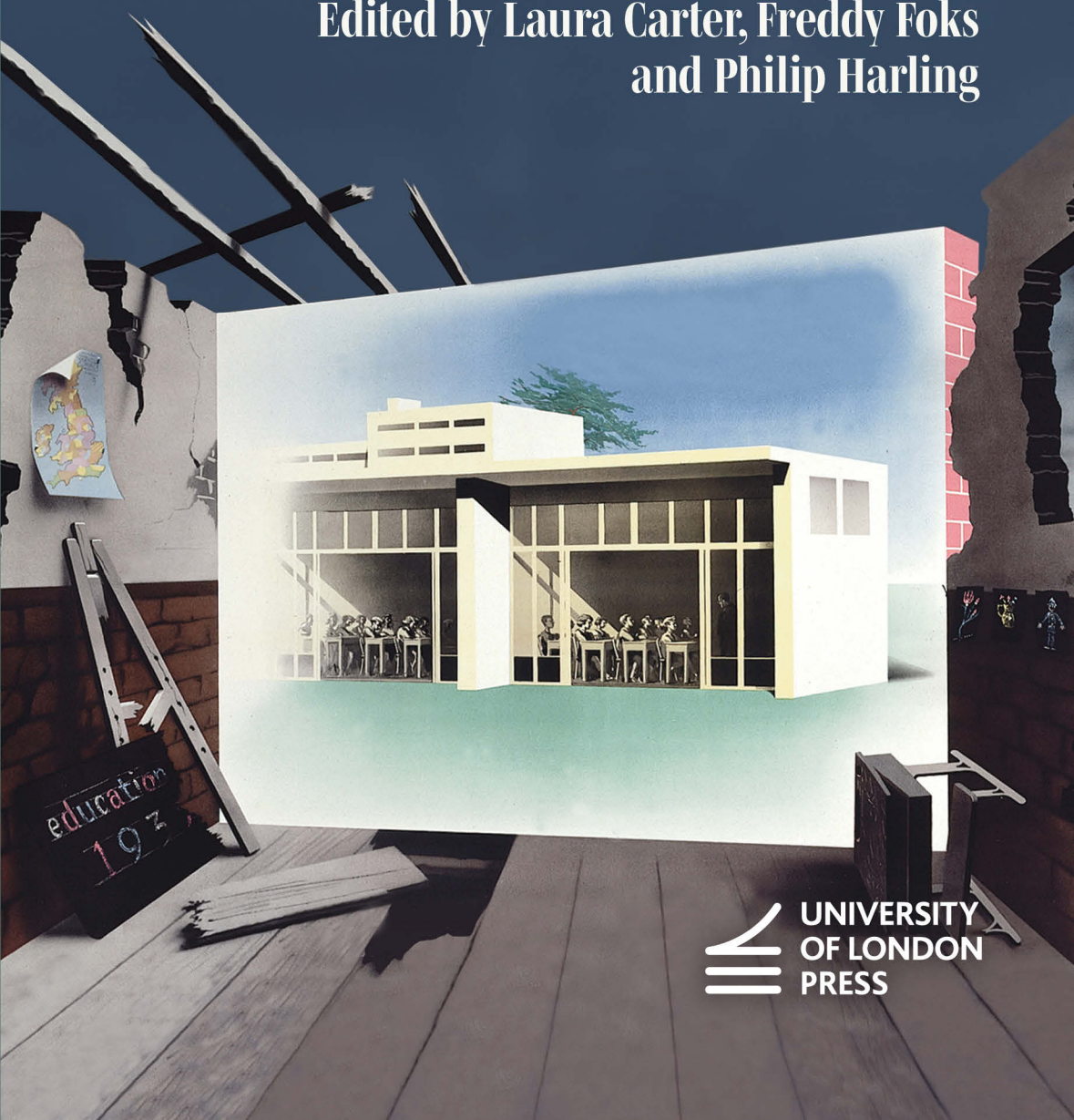


DEMOCRATISING HISTORY

Modern British History Inside and Out

Edited by Laura Carter, Freddy Foks
and Philip Harling



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Introduction: democratising history inside and out

Laura Carter and Freddy Foks

‘Democracy’ is a word with a contested history, long open to claims from both the political left and right. According to the sociologist Charles Tilly, democracies possess three basic properties: a ‘broad and relatively equal citizenship’, a ‘binding consultation of citizens in regard to state personnel and policies’, and the ‘protection of citizens from arbitrary state action’.¹ Thus according to Tilly’s definition, democracy names neither a particular type of regime nor the bottom-up contention of people power alone. Democracy is a process anchored in a set of constitutive relations between state and citizens that mostly concerns the scope of citizenship itself. Histories of democracy should thus relate government, legislation and incumbent political elites to a wider array of actors and social and cultural movements pushing in from the margins of the state to redefine the political centre.

To most historians of modern Britain, this will not sound controversial. But when Peter Mandler’s *Aristocratic Government in the Age of Reform* was published in 1990, for example, it was praised (and questioned) for introducing a wider cast of characters into its explanations for high political change.² In recent decades, working-class histories, feminist histories, Black British histories, immigration histories, disability histories and LGBTQ+ histories have transformed historiographies of citizenship and democratisation. The histories of democracy that historians now produce are more contested and multi-vocal than they were a generation ago.

Accepting and advancing this premise, *Democratising History* brings together nine chapters exploring new ways to think about the history of democracy in Britain. And the book’s six interludes explain how the professional field of modern British history has *itself* undergone a quite radical process of democratisation over the past forty years as a result of

educational expansion in the UK. This combination of chapters and interludes tells of two interlinked democratising processes in modern British history, the intellectual and the professional, which we call the ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ perspective, respectively.

The ‘inside’ history of democratisation, that is, the historical research and findings, is told through the chapters. They span the early nineteenth to late twentieth centuries, covering the complex relationship between Britain and its empire, the democratisation of metropolitan culture, and how experts aimed to inform public debate in a changing, democratic society. The interludes deal with the democratising forces ‘outside’ the academy that have been shaping the histories of democratisation written ‘inside’ it, by changing the profession itself. In seminar rooms and on funding applications, confronted with educational massification and ‘impact’ agendas, historians have been wrestling daily with democratisation in real time since the 1980s. *Democratising History* contends that it is the people who fund, teach and learn history that have reshaped the intellectual character of the field.

In the same way, the historian Peter Mandler has always championed histories that put people and their choices at their core. The chapters and interludes in this book are brought together to celebrate Peter’s career and scholarship, marking his retirement in 2025 after more than forty years of service to the discipline and profession of modern British history. Peter’s kaleidoscopic bibliography includes research on politics, ideas, architecture, heritage, education, social science, collecting, philanthropy and much else besides. No one theme unites Peter’s eclectic interests, but whether writing about Whigs and Radicals, stately homes and heritage, the remaking of cities, or the transition to universal secondary education, Peter has often considered democratisation crucial, and in recent years it has entered front and centre stage. In this way he has contributed to what we are calling in this book the ‘inside’ historiography of democracy in modern Britain, and each chapter develops and extends a different aspect of this work. The interludes, meanwhile, capture how Peter’s career has been shaped by, and how he has himself shaped, the ‘outside’ forces affecting the history profession, via his advocacy, institution-building and stewardship of learned societies.

The outside: grungy business

This first part of the introduction tackles the view of democratisation from the ‘outside’, meaning history as a public-facing profession rather than as an intellectual, research-based pursuit. The focus here is on higher education

in the UK, where Peter Mandler has spent most of his career, although the editors and authors of this book work and teach across Britain, Australia, Europe and the USA. According to research carried out in 2013, UK-based History departments are dominated by historians working on the national field, that is, British and Irish history. Indeed, UK departments seem to be even more wedded to their 'home histories' than departments in the USA and Canada, as well as doing less historical research on the non-Western world.³ Over the last forty years, these plentiful UK-based modern British historians have been working in universities that are ever more open to diverse student bodies and more accountable to society at large, part of a broader democratisation of British society. This democratisation began with the universalisation of secondary education after the Second World War, and was followed by the opening up of higher education to larger numbers of students at the century's end.

As far back as 1944, when UK secondary schools became universalised for all children, democratisation was a contested and stilted process bound up with class, gender and place. Expanding the pipeline between secondary and higher education started with the removal of selection at age eleven to enter secondary schools (in Britain). Then came rising rates of staying on and participation in education beyond the age of sixteen among girls, followed by a shift in how students were perceived by the public at large. Despite a temporary slowdown in the 1970s, by 1991 one in five eighteen- to nineteen-year-olds entered higher education across the UK, one in four in Scotland and Northern Ireland.⁴ This growth came from an increase in mature students, in female participation (mature and young), and attendance at polytechnics and further education colleges.⁵ Throughout these years activists and parents worked to challenge and compensate for racial and gender-based discrimination in schools.⁶ It was therefore the demand from new constituents that democratised secondary education, finally unleashed via a universal school-leaving qualification for students in England, Wales and Northern Ireland in the form of the GCSE (introduced in 1986).⁷

What did all this mean for History as a subject in UK higher education? Some answers are provided in Iwan Morgan's interlude, which recounts how historians working at City of London Polytechnic in the 1990s responded to the new landscape. In their transatlantic interlude, Deborah Cohen, Guy Ortolano and Susan Pedersen see these times as the 'grey Major years', but important educational changes were afoot. From 1992 the distinction between universities and polytechnics was officially removed.⁸ This was also the era that finally saw the entry of (white) women into the field of professional history *en masse* in Britain, after decades of funnelling their historical energies into research-adjacent

and precarious or ‘amateur’ roles.⁹ Thus, with the view from inner London, Morgan renders the two sides of democratisation clear: the opportunity to craft a more dynamic history speaking to the identities of a diversified student body, set against the free-market conditions that an ambitious ‘old’ Poly was obliged to survive in just to be available to those students in the first place. Peter Mandler, a colleague of Morgan’s during this time who cut his teeth on these educational challenges, once described this 1990s milieu as the ‘grungy London universities’.¹⁰ Perhaps democratisation has always been a grungy business.

This diversified and enlarged public for history in universities has gradually prompted more academic historians to take an interest in the histories being taught in UK secondary schools. To the frustration of ordinary schoolteachers, this has often gone hand-in-hand with high-profile political interventions taken without broad consultation of the teaching profession, such as the 2010 appointment of Simon Schama as ‘history tsar’ in service of Michael Gove’s much-publicised curriculum reforms.¹¹ Meanwhile, the Historical Association, the UK’s professional organisation for History teachers formed in 1906, has been doing this work for much longer and closer to the chalkface.¹²

But a stronger pull from the ‘outside’ has brought university-based historians into this conversation since the new millennium, a period in which school History has largely thrived, remaining the second-most popular A-Level and Scottish Higher Arts, Humanities and Social Science subject option in 2024.¹³ Some colleagues have worked with external organisations to co-produce classroom resources for teachers promoting more diverse histories.¹⁴ Another example was the commitment by the much-missed Arthur Burns alongside Peter Mandler to build a closer relationship with the History teaching community via the Historical Association. This led to Ofsted’s National Leader for History being co-opted onto the Royal Historical Society’s (RHS) Education Policy Committee in 2010, and further collaboration in response to the controversial review of the National Curriculum that followed.¹⁵ In their interlude, Rebecca Sullivan and Andrew Stacey Chapman argue that through this work academic historians have come to understand History curricula in schools as ‘contested, living things’, a crucial step if they want their interventions, not to mention their research, to have any impact in the everyday life of the classroom.

A more generally educated population since the 1980s, whether as students of History or not, has generated a robust public and market for the UK’s thriving heritage industry. This is another area where professional historians in the UK now routinely take an interest in life ‘outside’ the academy, as co-producers with communities, and as critics.¹⁶ Older, elite

heritage spaces have been particularly subject to scrutiny in this climate of critical reflection. Rebecca Lyons explores the Royal Academy's recent work to this end in her interlude, drawing inspiration from Peter Mandler's heritage analysis that emphasises the tensions between past and present. This view from a heritage insider reminds us how an increased desire for access and inclusivity must be balanced with other competing imperatives such as funding, footfall and the preservation and integrity of 'old things'.

Overall, historians of modern Britain based in UK universities are now required to ensure their research is both accessible and accountable. Accessibility and accountability are, in part, the products of 'outside', democratising forces, driven by education. But if adapting to student demand and engaging with History teaching in schools and the heritage sector are the broadly constructive outcomes of these demands on the profession, there is also a murkier side. In their interlude exploring Peter Mandler's RHS years, Margot Finn and Richard Fisher focus on how historians responded to top-down edicts that academic research should be published open access in the 2010s. This change was cast, and welcomed, as democratic for making academic knowledge more widely accessible. Yet the top-down nature of this shift often undercut its democratic ambitions, with policy decisions being placed on the history profession as 'an act of state'. This was a very different kind of push for access compared to the bottom-up student demand for higher education.

More troubling still is the cautionary tale found in Ambreena Manji's interlude. Over the past several years, historians have begun questioning the origins of the wealth underpinning their research institutions derived from the profits of the transatlantic slave trade and other imperial endeavours.¹⁷ Yet Manji reveals a much more recent episode in the history of UK research funding within the ruthless 'grant capture' culture, with its own consequences for inequalities in the Global South. She details the rise and fall of the Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF), which she and Peter Mandler analysed in 2016 to expose a case of the government 'double counting' money allocated to both UK Research and Aid budgets. The democratisation of history in modern Britain, meaning access for more students and more researchers generating more historical knowledge, has brought with it an ever more complicated and contested machinery of research funding from the purse of the state. In practice, this has eroded academics' independence.

These two recent occurrences suggest that one of the unforeseen consequences of the democratisation of history in UK higher education since the 1980s is that, under the guise of access and accountability, historians and their research are now increasingly subject to the will of the

state. On the side of research, the best bulwark against state direction has historically been the UK Research Councils' adherence to the 1918 'Haldane principle', which safeguards the right of researchers to decide where to spend their research money over the will of politicians. On the side of teaching, it was once the 1963 'Robbins principle' that higher education should be available to all those 'who are qualified by ability and attainment to pursue them and who wish to do so'. The cuts and closures that are now devastating UK History departments in the 2020s, and the lack of state intervention before 2024 to save them, signals a different approach (although the seeds of this situation are found already in Morgan's 1990s story).¹⁸ What is undeniable is that from circa 2010 both Haldane and Robbins came under attack, actively and passively, by the UK Coalition and Conservative governments. Peter Mandler has consistently spoken and acted in defence of both.¹⁹

In such a professional climate, individuals and institutions matter more than ever. The message of Deborah Cohen, Guy Ortolano and Susan Pedersen's interlude is that it is people who sustain a discipline. They show how individuals can always find opportunities to re-shape the discipline for the better, even with blunt forces coming from above and unpredictable forces arriving from below. Their ode to Peter Mandler's career-long project of building transatlantic bridges in modern British history highlights that energetic individuals and savvy institutions remain the best barrier to the harshest influences on the discipline. These influences might come from the market or the state, or from structural inequalities that are deeply embedded in culture and society. The RHS's 2024 update to its 'Race, Ethnicity, & Equality' report shows how far institutions can make a difference here too, for example in hiring more Black and minority ethnic staff and implementing departmental initiatives. But it also shows the damage that losing precious individual scholars in areas like Black British history will do to the discipline overall.²⁰

The professional changes described so far have clearly profoundly affected the careers of modern British historians in the UK, but do we write different kinds of histories as a result of all this grungy business of democratisation? We want to suggest that 'outside' democratisation has indeed touched the 'inside' of modern British history, too. Working from within a more democratised discipline has shaped the way we write the UK's own history of democracy over the *longue durée*. As Britain's democratic culture has diversified and more plural publics have entered UK higher education, so historians' own sense of the history of democracy has been transformed.

The inside: democracy under construction

This introduction now turns to the job of plotting an ‘inside’ perspective on the history of democracy and democratisation in Britain since the early nineteenth century. Its additional task is to introduce the chapters of this book.

We see political and cultural democratisation in the UK as having been affected by forces acting on three levels. Taking a view from the ‘top down’ reveals how shifting social structures have interacted with the UK’s multi-national political geography. At the second level of causation, we find reformers, experts and politicians who have sought to interpret, guide and direct these changes from the ‘middle out’. Third, are the forces arising from the ‘bottom up’. As education spread in all forms and the electoral franchise expanded, this third force came from ever wider swathes of the population. Rather than seeing these three forces as something like a static triangle, with social structures at the top, politics in the middle and culture at the bottom, this book weaves these forces together.

To tell this story we take inspiration from the definition of democracy given by the sociologist Charles Tilly at the outset of this introduction. We focus in particular on the first part of his definition: the ‘broad’ and ‘equal’ citizenship implied by democratic politics. This section of the introduction centres on the broadening and equalising of citizenship, with education, broadly defined, playing a major part in that process. Another aspect of Tilly’s account of democratisation that we find salutary is his likening of democratisation to a work of construction: ‘sites of democracy always display the sign Under Construction’.²¹ We keep this ‘Under Construction’ sign on display throughout this introduction because the history of democratisation in the UK must not be told as a path-dependent story of triumph; there was and is nothing inevitable about that process. What follows instead is a narrative of unfinished democratic reforms amidst cultural and social change.

1832–1914

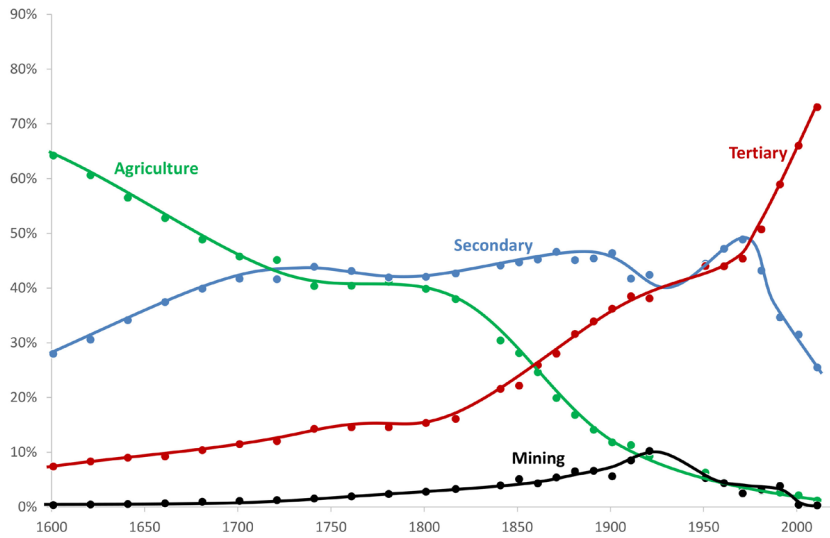
Looking to our three forces (‘top down’, ‘middle out’, ‘bottom up’) helps explain the democratising trends that emerged at the outset of the ‘Age of Reform’ in the 1820s and 1830s, at the very beginning of our story. Moved by Catholic popular protest in Ireland and agrarian riots in England, a combination of Tory and Whig interests created an unlikely coalition in favour of parliamentary reform by 1832. The Representation of the People

Act passed that year broadened the male franchise and redistributed constituencies. This was not a move towards the creation of democracy by those who passed the legislation. But 1832 did precipitate a trend whereby ‘democracy’ came to sit at the heart of subsequent political debates, spoken of by most political elites as something best avoided, but, at least for a few radicals, as a positive vision of a desirable system of government.²²

The threat of social and political upheaval, or even revolution, in the 1830s and 1840s naturally attracted commentary from the Tory ‘middle’. As Ben Weinstein shows in his chapter on the historian Archibald Alison, much contemporary political analysis came in the guise of history writing about the recent past and connected domestic politics in the UK with the fate of the British empire.

‘Top down’ changes to the UK’s social structure were just as crucial to democratisation as reform in ‘the middle’. By the turn of the nineteenth century, Britain was becoming a preponderantly urban island and parliamentarians thought that the interests of the urban boroughs should be better represented in the House of Commons. A strong sense of the changes in patterns of men’s work is given in [Figure 0.1](#), which maps the sharp decline in the proportion of the adult male labour force undertaking agricultural occupations in England and Wales since 1600, with particularly dramatic change occurring in the fifty or so years between 1832, 1867 and 1884, the years of the First, Second and Third Reform Acts. Here were the social bases of a mass franchise based on male heads of household.

Clearly, this story of democratisation centred on the franchise does not tell us much about citizenship, nor does it hold true for all sexes or ages, or across the whole of the UK, let alone in the British empire. Education has always been critical to the process of political and cultural democratisation from the ‘bottom up’. From private, feminist day schools to working-class reading and writing, to associational life, museum-visiting and survey-making, Britain’s relatively organic educational culture nourished the growth of its political democracy in the nineteenth-century metropole by expanding the realm of active citizenship. A patchwork of informal educational opportunities emerged, through the mutual improvement movement and Mechanics’ Institutes, although these were concentrated in urban areas and on skilled, working-age men. The economic and social changes inaugurated by industrialisation increased choices at work for women in some ways, but their intellectual opportunities remained severely limited. For children, the economy demanded most boys and girls aged ten and over to perform work suited to their nimble fingers; it did not need them in school.²³ Educational opportunities slowly



Source: Occupational Structure of Britain Project; testamentary database; parish register database; national censuses; I-CeM; C.H. Lee; UK Dataservice

Figure 0.1: The male occupational structure of England and Wales (percentage of the labour force), 1600–2011. Source: Occupational Structure of Britain Project; testamentary database; parish register database; national censuses; I-CeM; C.H. Lee; UK Dataservice. Reproduced by permission of CAMPOP.

expanded, nevertheless. From the 1830s state funding for elementary education was first channelled through religious societies. By the 1860s such funding came with a demand for a rise in standards and efficiency attached, and with the 1870 Elementary Education Act the state finally made provision for a national system of elementary education in England and Wales, overseen by democratically elected School Boards.²⁴

Educational reform, urbanisation and (de)industrialisation played out differently across these islands. In Ireland, the lives of the rural poor were devastated by the Great Famine of 1845–52. Long-term emigration made the country more, rather than less rural, while the enfranchised population collapsed by as much as a half.²⁵ Nor did Ireland benefit from any educational reform equivalent to England and Wales's 1870 Education Act. All schools apart from technical schools remained owned and run by either the Protestant or the Catholic church.

The nineteenth-century picture becomes even more complex when we look beyond the UK to the British empire. The spread of democracy in Australia, Canada, New Zealand and South Africa between 1850 and 1900 reveals what the sociologist Michael Mann calls democracy's 'dark side'.²⁶ This is because First Nations, indigenous and aboriginal peoples

were mainly excluded from representation and mass violence and ethnic cleansing marched ahead of the making of parliamentary government. For most of the unenfranchised in the empire, their lives were marred by famine, poverty, military occupation and a dearth of civil and political liberties.

Neither did British colonial administrators impose coherent, national school systems in Britain's colonies. Instead, education in the nineteenth- and twentieth-century colonial empire was characterised by a patchwork of missionary and philanthropic schools, elite English education for the offspring of the imperial bureaucracy, and indigenous schools in all their diversity (which had to be monitored). In the particularly complex multi-lingual case of British Malaya, for instance, Chinese schools became a major focus of anxiety for the imperial state because the British were themselves so poor at acquiring expertise in Chinese languages and culture.²⁷ The broader imperial project, notably in India, conflated English language education with modernisation and 'civilisation', latterly providing government funds to foster this ideology. But this did not always have straightforward effects. By the early twentieth century, democratic impulses in India arising from the bottom up for 'modern', knowledge-based education led his own supporters to reject Gandhi's educational initiatives, which were narrowly vocational and ultimately class-bound.²⁸

Such differences in educational provision between Britain, Ireland, Malaya and India reflected the unequal development of citizenship across the British empire. During the nineteenth century voices from the 'middle' often tried to explain such inequalities by evoking nature and history and God's providence. Ideas about 'civilisational' difference intersected with arguments about different populations' fitness for 'responsible government'. Such mid-Victorian writing about the supremacy of British 'civilisation' ranged from relatively popular forms of evangelical providentialism to a relatively marginal avowal of scientific racism.²⁹ In almost all of these different varieties of cultural hagiography, Britain was purported to be an 'advanced' society while most others were described by comparison as 'backward', 'stagnant', or even 'regressive'. In his chapter on the Anglo-Chinese Wars of the mid-nineteenth century, Philip Harling foregrounds the primacy of this British stadial thinking in relation to China, a Victorian imperial logic so strong that it could unite pro- and anti-opiumists in the metropole.

For those colonised populations seeking peaceful means of political change in this era of imperialism, the best that the unenfranchised could do was to collect a petition and appeal to the Crown, the Colonial Office or the Houses of Parliament.³⁰ Meetings, speeches, demonstrations, and the

rise of mass circulation newspapers all seem to have had a more democratising impact on political culture in Britain.³¹ Mass movements and bottom-up mobilisation flourished in the period leading up to and after 1832. Chartism was the most famous of these movements in Britain, dissipating after 1848 as political liberalism rose to prominence. Social and economic reforms in the mid-nineteenth century around trade, the working day, and conditions in factories and mines by the Victorian state coincided with the tenor of much 'bottom up' contention, which centred on removing the arbitrary power of employers, state and church from peoples' lives.³²

None of these popular agitations or state responses to them would have been possible without changes in educational culture. In Britain there was a widespread working-class appetite for the democratisation of knowledge and culture throughout the nineteenth century. Education was also a focus of middle-class feminists long before they turned to the vote, buoyed by the 1864–8 Taunton Commission's questioning of entrenched ideas about the difference in mental capacities of girls and boys.³³ In 1871 the Girls Public Day School Company was founded, inaugurating a network of fee-paying schools that would teach intellectual rather than purely moral and practical lessons to middle-class girls. Thus the history of suffrage in Britain allows us to trace one line between the democratisation of culture, in the form of liberal education, and the democratisation of politics.³⁴ As a middle-class story of white women's development, however, it is also a stark reminder of the classed and racialised history of democratisation in modern Britain. Arguments about extending the vote to women in the metropole could comfortably co-exist with arguments for maintaining anti-democratic hierarchies in other parts of the British empire well into the twentieth century.³⁵

If we can detect a growing appetite for knowledge as a route to self-determination and self-knowledge (spiritual and secular) among the working classes in Britain, bourgeois identities and tastes, male and female, were being shaped and expanded by the marketplace. By the 1870s, urban commerce and new forms of consumption were enabling the 'middle' to engage more fully with elite culture. Sally Woodcock's chapter explores this democratising trend for the middle classes in relation to the art world, exploiting the business archives of a Victorian colourist to nuance our understanding of the position of the 'amateur' artist in this period. Woodcock's story might start with the paint, but it eventually shows how much the people mattered.

The burgeoning of a commercial society in Victorian Britain was a major concern for liberal elites looking from the 'middle out'. Many writers and politicians thought that the market economy must be stimulated,

children needed educating and the bourgeois family had to be defended and stabilised in order to gradually extend reasonable opinion and reasonable mores among the 'masses'.³⁶ On this model, citizenship was most often associated with educability and opposed to 'dependence'. In this way, education united 'bottom up' appetites with much 'middle out' equivocation about how necessary it was to educate 'the masses' before they should be included within the parliamentary franchise and so achieve greater political rights. These ideas grew up in the wake of notions of a 'natural order' which combined Christian morality and new ideas in political economy.³⁷ This ideology prized the dignity of labour and the sanctity of property whose flipside was a widespread stigmatising of the poorest and most disadvantaged members of society, some of whose fate was to be thrown into the post-1834 New Poor Law workhouses. From the 1830s onwards, citizenship most often combined gendered inequality with the having and holding of property: receipt of poor relief meant automatic disenfranchisement for men from the parliamentary electorate until 1918.

Such new ideologies about work and property and citizenship emerged amidst industrialisation, urbanisation and the growth of working-class politics, all of which precipitated some fear in the 'middle' about the stability of the social order. In this context the broadening of the electoral franchise was not always pursued to foment more political democracy. After all, the franchise reforms of 1832, 1867 and 1884 were not intended by most parliamentarians to create a 'democracy' based on an equal and broad citizenship for all adults; electoral reform was most often conceived by politicians as a way to forestall such a system arising by tying male owners of property and heads of household into a mixed constitution of Commons, Lords and Crown.³⁸ Yet whatever the intent of parliamentarians, after the Third Reform Act of 1884 something like a very limited form of 'democracy' had been established among adult men in the UK because more than half of them could vote by the time of the 1885 election. This greater enfranchisement of men precipitated the rise of working-class electoral politics and had a knock-on effect on arguments in favour of the enfranchisement of women, bringing female suffrage to the fore of British politics by the 1890s.³⁹

The other issue dominating at this time was Irish Home Rule. Female suffrage and Home Rule were practically and ideologically interlinked; both demanded a drastic reimagining of the category of citizenship and this new kind of politics was driven by cultural change, in relation to gender and in relation to Catholicism.⁴⁰ Working-class politics was also changing, as the social and political power of the miners', dockers' and railwaymen's unions grew with the economy's reliance on coal as an

energy source.⁴¹ And militant forms of feminism developed, incubating more meaningful appeals to working women, with the founding of the Women's Social and Political Union in 1903. The *fin de siècle* was thus a time of widespread debate about the future of democracy in Britain, and widespread contests over which sections of the population might be included in a broader and more equal citizenship.

Clearly, Tilly's warning that sites of democracy must display the sign 'Under Construction' is especially apposite in the case of nineteenth-century Britain. The parliamentary franchise was narrow and limited to (not all) men in the UK, while despotism reigned across much of the British empire. Despite the educational impulses and initiatives arriving all around, the equal development of democratic citizenship was severely circumscribed, especially in the empire and for women and the working classes in the metropole. Democratisation could appear to be deeply embedded, shallow or even absent depending on one's vantage point. To many upper-class English men in 'the middle', the prospect of democracy may have seemed less fearful in 1914 than it might have seemed to their forebears in the 1830s, because male working-class enfranchisement had led (on the whole) to 'bottom up' incorporation into Westminster politics. To the very different constituencies of Indian nationalists, Irish republicans and militant feminists, however, the British state seemed bent on upholding tyranny. Whatever contemporaries' views of the extent and reach of democratic reform, almost all those who lived through the First World War agreed that it changed the British state and its democratic culture beyond recognition.

1914–39

The First World War saw the old political certainties of minimal government, balanced budgets and fidelity to the gold standard jettisoned in fits of social and economic mobilisation.⁴² A political order that had excluded women from the parliamentary franchise struggled to survive public displays of male pacifism and the female war effort.⁴³ With the passing of the Representation of the People Act in 1918 almost all men over twenty-one were enfranchised and so too were those over nineteen if they had served in the armed forces. Women over thirty were also eligible to vote on the basis of a property qualification or marriage to a male householder. An anticipated Education Act for England and Wales passed in the summer of 1918. While most of its key provisions were subsequently cut in postwar economy drives, it spurred a conversation around the democratisation of secondary education in the labour movement, and in circles of government, that

responded to the growth of ‘bottom up’ demand and could not be quelled long term.⁴⁴

The war wrought even more dramatic changes in Ireland. A new generation of voters, often unattached by sentiment and loyalty to the politics of the Irish Parliamentary Party, elected Sinn Féin to a sweeping victory across the south and west in 1918 and the party subsequently called for the establishment of the Dáil in Dublin. The War of Independence then broke out, and peace talks and a treaty followed in 1921 which fomented, in turn, a civil war. Partition created the Irish Free State and Northern Ireland, with its own assembly at Stormont. Yet while elections would be contested in the North, unionist grandees reassured themselves that they could never lose because gerrymandering assured their party’s supremacy.⁴⁵

As democratisation faltered in Northern Ireland and political incumbents forestalled and rolled back what Charles Tilly termed the ‘binding consultation of citizens in regard to state personnel and policies’⁴⁶ via gerrymandering, culture in interwar Britain was decidedly oriented around the *idea* of democracy, even if that idea carried multiple meanings. Politically, electoral contests became less agitated and dramatic as the three main parties – Conservative, Labour and Liberal – sought to steady the polity and adapt themselves to a new mass electorate.⁴⁷ Under Stanley Baldwin, the Conservatives were particularly successful in appealing to a ‘bottom up’ groundswell of anti-socialism as democratic, and astutely targeted newly enfranchised middle-class female voters, particularly after the equalisation of the franchise between men and women in 1928.⁴⁸ Meanwhile, a plethora of voluntary associations acted as a stabilising force, making links between state and society and drawing legitimacy from the expanding provision of social welfare policies enacted by local and central government.⁴⁹ These decades also saw the spread of new media and more opportunities for leisure and consumption that nourished democratic ideals.⁵⁰ There is no doubt that British culture was becoming democratised at a pace after the First World War. And this democratic culture rested upon a spreading consensus around mass education, even if the democratisation of access to *formal* education was slow. Youth activities, from the socialist-eugenicist ‘Woodcraft Folk’, to BBC discussion groups, to the League of Nations Union, played at modelling forms of democracy for the next generation.⁵¹

Into the fray entered a cohort of individuals from the ‘middle’, pushing for democracy at full throttle, but with their feet hovering over the brakes just in case democratisation started going too far, too fast. The 1920s and 1930s are often seen as the golden age of such democratising reformers, whose goal was to harness the attention of an education-hungry public to change institutions, whilst still retaining their ideological power to

shape political change. Many of these men and women found their home at the new-born BBC, where, from 1927, Sir John Reith presided over a project of cultural democratisation at the cutting edge of technological change.⁵² Beyond the wireless, another such figure is found in Heidi Egginton's chapter in the form of Sir Robert Witt, chairman and co-founder of the National Art Collections Fund. Witt's attempts to open the elite art world up to a broader, art-loving public are typical of the interwar project to democratise culture by equalising access to previously elite arenas of consumption, which was happening parallel to the completion of franchise reform.

But there were others, especially intellectuals, who fretted that democracy was in crisis even as it began to take root in the culture.⁵³ How could mass participation in politics, they asked, be squared with the power of the capitalist press and amidst widespread ignorance about current affairs? The Russian Revolution, the end of parliamentary systems of government across Europe, the rise of fascism and Nazism and the Great Depression all made parliamentary democracy, and reciprocal relations between state and citizen in Britain, seem ever fragile.

If these debates about Britain's political democracy between the wars are relatively well studied, Chika Tonooka's chapter takes us into lesser-known territory during the same period. Through a case study of two interwar anthropologists studying China and Japan, she examines what their reluctance to claim and share their expertise on non-Western cultures tells us about the '(im)possibility for the democratisation of academic knowledge' before the Second World War. Unlike other democratising reformers occupying the 'middle' space dotted throughout this book, the Seligmans lacked both the personality and the educational channels to diffuse their expertise. For all the mounting demand from 'below', the democratisation of knowledge in Britain needed accessible educational infrastructure, be that schools, public museums or radio waves. This much was clear to political parties and civil society organisations who realised that as international crises peaked during the 1930s, they must reach out to try to educate their voters and their members via new media, as well as at book clubs, public talks and rallies.

1939–99

Between 1939 and 1945 war acted, as it had after 1914, as a profound catalyst for cultural and social change. The Second World War transformed Britain's self-image as a democratic nation. The visible participation of women in the war effort and a cross-class consensus around upholding

democratic freedoms in the face of Nazism contributed to a widespread sense that citizenship needed to be broadened and equalised beyond its political aspects in order to encompass social rights, too. War also reset expectations of the state and consolidated a negative view of the high unemployment of the 1920s and 1930s. By mid-war, the cabinet was made up of a coalition of Labour and Conservative ministers, and a cross-party consensus had emerged that pre-war economic and social policies had failed. So, when the relatively obscure academic and administrator William Beveridge published a report on social service reform in November 1942, his recommendations met an audience in the 'middle' and 'the bottom' that was receptive to the idea of change. For the American GI Robert Jackson Alexander, with whom we tour Britain in Lawrence Black's chapter, his wartime observations of Britain's landscape, heritage and people indeed left an impression of an 'old' country in need of renewal and bursting with discussion about what form this might take.

For a time, consensus in the 'middle' led the wartime and postwar governments to publish a string of significant reports and pass landmark legislation that led to talk of the arrival of a 'welfare state'. The Butler Act of 1944 made provisions for universal secondary education in England and Wales. The Family Allowances Act of 1945 inaugurated a system of child benefits. Further reforms followed when a Labour government created a National Health Service and nationalised the coal industry, as well as gas, electricity, railways and the Bank of England. A spirit of reform certainly marked the domestic politics of 1943–51, although much of the postwar government's focus was on productivist economic policy and fell short of Beveridge's hopes. Overall, the result was a new relationship between state and society and a new sense in 'the middle' (profoundly different from ideas among governing elites in the nineteenth century) that social change could itself be 'moulded and modified, made and un-made by acts of political will'.⁵⁴ The effects of such a change on democratic politics were complex, especially when we combine it with an account of Britain's domestic and imperial state.

Democracy entered imperial policy, but often in a roundabout way and most often at the moment of decolonisation with the writing of new constitutions for the new nations. A new idea arose at this time that imperialism meant tutelage in democratic self-government and the spread of the 'Westminster model' of representation to the empire as a whole, not just to the Dominions of Australia, Canada, New Zealand and South Africa. This was, in part, though, a self-serving idea that belied the plurality of debates about democracy taking place in the decolonising empire and allowed many among the British political elite to argue that the decolonisation of the British empire was an inevitable part of the broader

democratisation of the postwar world, rather than a crisis for Britain as a great power.⁵⁵

Back in the metropole, the huge expansion of state spending after 1945 as a proportion of GDP and increased welfare provision augmented the realm of social citizenship. New housing, new estates and new towns were one of the clearest illustrations of the greater role of central and local government in peoples' lives. Architects and planners sought to embody the spirit of this postwar democratic age in the built environment and an assortment of 'experts' tried to mediate between the expanded state and the people it governed. Otto Saumarez Smith's chapter reassesses the relationship between sociology and architecture within this growing melange of experts by looking at the work of architect Oliver Cox and his axiom to 'design as if the people mattered'.

Even if social class remained the guiding framework of Britain's political culture until at least the 1970s, historians are increasingly finding points of dialogue between democratic expectations 'from below' and interested experts in the 'middle'.⁵⁶ For as the state took up more and more social space, so the potential for contestation grew as citizens debated the way social services were distributed, and experts pushed themselves into 'the middle'.⁵⁷ One example can be found in educational provision. Democratic expectations were putting pressure on the welfare state's new system of secondary education as soon as it began bedding into community and family life in the 1950s. The 1944 Act might have made secondary education free in England and Wales, but it also kept it selective. Working-class parents with no experience of schooling beyond age fourteen rapidly applied their 'democratic expectations' to their kids' education, which ultimately meant grammar schools for *everyone*.⁵⁸ In Scotland, where secondary schools distinguished between three- and five-year courses by selection, a combination of a different examination system and a longstanding commitment to a broad liberal curriculum yielded a system more in line with the Scottish ideal of the 'democratic intellect'.⁵⁹ The same cannot be said for Northern Ireland, whose 1947 Education Act instituted a messy and complicated financial compromise between state, Protestant and Catholic interests. Secondary education was universal in Northern Ireland, but grammar schools continued to charge fees.⁶⁰

With this shaky new educational infrastructure across the UK came new actors willing to assume the role of expert. Expertise and democracy were now linked at almost every point of contact between state and society, but everyday, experiential expertise in particular was also becoming increasingly important after 1945.⁶¹ Schoolteachers were at the chalkface of these interactions. As such, Rosie Germain's chapter shows how teacher expertise in Liverpool secondary modern schools was marshalled to

uphold traditional gender identities, extending beyond their pupils and into the expectations placed on postwar mothers and fathers.

Another particularly important arena of democratic contestation, expertise and the state concerned migration, nationality and citizenship. Many men, women and children arrived in Britain from the Empire-Commonwealth after 1945 to reside and work in the UK. Yet despite the notional political equality of most of these arrivals with prior residents of the UK as British subjects and, after 1948, as Citizens of the UK and Commonwealth, they experienced profoundly unequal abilities to enjoy the fullness of social citizenship via access to the welfare state, housing and the labour market. In response, Black British and British Asian activists, many of them female and working at the grassroots, mobilised against injustice at the hands of the police, landlords, employers, xenophobes and racists, and argued that the labour market and provision of social services were riddled with inequality.⁶² In schools, the community-led Black Education Movement rallied against local government plans to 'band' pupils in secondary schools according to academic performance in the late 1960s, knowing how this practice compounded racist, linguistic and cultural judgements against African-Caribbean children.⁶³

While Black British understandings and reformulations of 'race' in postwar Britain have been central to recent historiography, the chapter by Christopher Hilliard in this book refocuses our attention onto the 'relations' part of 'race relations' research. He argues that when it comes to studying expert views about race and immigration, not enough focus has been placed on the quantitative work of geographers and the stylistic devices of journalists. Experts in the 'middle' seeking to explain and manage Britain's transition to a multi-racial democracy in the 1950s and 1960s were, according to Hilliard, as attentive to the granular and local norms of white working-class neighbourhoods as they were to universalist assumptions about 'black' and 'white'.

It was not only in relation to 'race' that affinity with the democratic state was fast becoming less about the vote and more about a recognition of individual identities. Women, children, old people, disabled people, the mentally ill, gay people and trans people all experienced different kinds of inequality that raised barriers to the fullest expression of social citizenship. During the 1960s, some reforms began to tackle gendered inequalities and the rights of sexual minorities. Homosexual law reform (1967), the Abortion Act (1967) and 'no fault' divorce (1969) all redrew the boundaries between public and private morality and between state and citizen in England and Wales (although not in Scotland or Northern Ireland). These changes were understood then, and ever since, as diffusely connected to a supposed fracturing of the postwar political 'consensus'.⁶⁴

In 1982, Stuart Hall characterised these legislative changes as ‘increased regulation coupled with selective privatization through contract or consent’.⁶⁵ Hall’s argument captures how state regulation carved out a new ‘private’ realm that was individualist and broadly liberal. Meanwhile, in ‘public’ spaces like secondary school classrooms, the UK government never offered any centrally directed policy on even heterosexual sex education, with schools left to avoid, fumble over or outsource the subject to external agents right up to the 2000s.⁶⁶

‘Bottom up’ forces filled the void. Youth cultures were transformed amidst changing norms about contraception and pre-marital sex. Sex and sexual knowledge soon became a new route to social respectability within and between peer groups.⁶⁷ And individual agency and responsibility can be understood as part of a broader cultural shift towards ‘popular individualism’ taking hold during the 1970s.⁶⁸ Radical, activist-led projects such as Women’s Liberation, Gay Liberation and Black Power all mobilised alongside more ‘ordinary’ sites of social change such as the working-class kitchen or the local comprehensive school. For example, pupil protests in the 1970s and 1980s against corporal punishment and school uniforms (notably girls’ demands to wear trousers) indicate that young people understood comprehensive education in democratic terms because it was a place where they had the right to be themselves and so embodied a more equal citizenship.⁶⁹

But for the ‘middle’ peering in, Britain’s comprehensive schools between the 1970s and 1990s were either the apotheosis of the postwar dream of democratic education or the living, breathing, rebellious proof of its fallacy. Established on a 1960s ideal that social-class mixing would create a new generation of more equal social-democratic citizens, pupils and teachers actually came to measure their lived experience in comprehensives through a much denser range of intersecting social identity markers: race, gender, sexuality and age. But no educational institution could sustain a democratic culture with respect to these multiple and multiplying criteria, and schools often fell back on internal mechanisms that sorted pupils into binary categories predicated on ‘ability’. The comprehensive school is therefore something of an object lesson for historians on the limits of democratisation in practice. The challenge instead is to account for the diversity of meanings being made in the process, their impact and their ‘throw’.⁷⁰

Comprehensivisation of schools and ‘permissive legislation’ may have led some in the ‘middle’ to worry about a breaking of political consensus in Britain during the 1960s, but that decade saw a completely different pattern of politics emerge in Northern Ireland. For one thing, ‘permissive’ legislation did not touch the province: neither abortion nor

homosexuality nor divorce law were reformed there. The welfare state and the UK government's commitment to full employment did, however, change Northern Irish politics and revealed stark inequalities. Catholics faced discriminatory employment practices in the private and public sectors and council housing allocations were the subject of great controversy.⁷¹ In exchange for the Church retaining control over its schools, Catholic secondary schools (voluntary schools) received much less direct funding from the Protestant state, meaning fewer resources and opportunities for Catholic pupils. Unionists were strictly vigilant about what they saw as the slightest state subsidies for Catholic education in the 1950s and 1960s, embedding inequalities and compromising the democratisation of the education system in Northern Ireland.⁷² Electoral politics provided little opportunity to challenge this state of affairs because constituencies were so gerrymandered as to effectively negate party competition at Stormont, handing power seemingly in perpetuity to the Ulster Unionist Party.⁷³

'Bottom up' and 'middle out' mobilisation contested this situation. By the summer of 1969 violent confrontations erupted in the streets, which the Royal Ulster Constabulary proved unwilling to police effectively and equitably. The subsequent deployment of the British army in Northern Ireland fed, in turn, a cycle of violent escalation. During the 'Troubles' the people of Northern Ireland experienced a catastrophe that touched almost every family. In March 1972 the Stormont Parliament was suspended and Northern Ireland was directly ruled from London, ushering in the end of what some political scientists call the 'ethnic democracy' of Unionist rule.⁷⁴

Meanwhile, British politics was entering a new age of constitutional and democratic debate. By the 1970s, 'decline' became more resonant amidst decolonisation, precipitating a sense of cultural unease among the UK's governing elites in 'the middle'.⁷⁵ New nationalisms in Scotland and Wales gained increasing popularity. For some, 'Europe' seemed like a possible solution to the malaise, and the UK's constitution was transformed by accession to the EEC in 1973. Meanwhile, militant confrontations between unions and government escalated following the election of Margaret Thatcher in 1979, and in the 1980s and 1990s deindustrialisation rapidly remade cities and regions.

Surveying the scene during the 1990s and 2000s, some academics and other experts in the 'middle' began proposing that a new ideology – 'neoliberalism' – had emerged, and that it was rolling back the frontiers of social citizenship across the UK. The character and extent of the UK's 'Neoliberal Age' remains contested.⁷⁶ Arriving at this unresolved debate brings us back to the moment in time where this introduction started, to

the ‘outside’ and to UK higher education in the 1990s, when free-market conditions posed challenges and delivered opportunities at century’s end. Today, the professional historian lives and works with the consequences in their everyday life.

In this introduction we have suggested that 200 years of political reforms, cultural changes and bottom-up demands for inclusion have led to a more democratised United Kingdom. Rather than narrate that story as an inevitable tale of political progress, we have tried to tell this history with the sign ‘Under Construction’ displayed prominently throughout and using education as our uniting theme – for there are deep ironies to the history of democratisation in the UK. As the franchise expanded, citizenship broadened and the government grew to take up a larger area of social and economic life, so the democratic state became the target of more and more debate and disquiet and disappointment. And when we study democratisation over time and across the UK’s multi-national political geography, its inherent frangibility comes to the fore. Democratisation arguably broke apart the UK, first with the partition of Ireland, and then broke up the British empire with decolonisation. The equalisation and broadening of citizenship was not spread evenly across these islands. In Northern Ireland, gerrymandering, a lack of party competition at Stormont, militant sectarianism and entrenched social inequalities set back democratisation in ways that profoundly diverged from Great Britain and which were only partially resolved with the signing of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998.

So rather than offer a ‘Whig’ history of inevitable democratic advancement, what we hope to have shown instead is that democratisation advances (and falls back) by crooked paths and not via clearly demarcated economic and political highways. At least as important as elite opinion in the ‘middle’ is an appetite for knowledge and inclusion coming from ‘the bottom’, expressed through the consistent demand for education. Alongside the politics and the economics, cultural and social forces are of prime importance to the ‘inside’ history of democratisation in the UK, and to the ‘outside’ democratisation of the subject of history in the UK. The chapters and interludes now take forward this spirit.

Notes

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4. P. Mandler, *The Crisis of the Meritocracy: Britain's Transition to Mass Education since the Second World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), pp. 79–99; *White Paper: Higher Education: A New Framework* (London: HMSO, 1991), p. 8.
5. *White Paper: Higher Education: Meeting the Challenge* (London: HMSO, 1987), pp. 4–5.
6. K. Andrews, *Resisting Racism: Race, Inequality, and the Black Supplementary School Movement* (London: Institute of Education Press, 2013).
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8. A provision of the Further and Higher Education Act 1992. See I. Morgan's interlude in this book.
9. L. Carter, 'Women Historians in the Twentieth Century', in H. Egginton and Z. Thomas (eds.), *Precarious Professionals: Gender, Identities, and Social Change in Modern Britain* (London: University of London Press, 2021), pp. 263–85.
10. See L. Black's chapter in this book.
11. J. Vasagar and A. Sparrow, 'Simon Schama to Advise Ministers on Overhaul of History Curriculum', *Guardian* (5 October 2010).
12. L. Carter, *Histories of Everyday Life: The Making of Popular Social History in Britain, 1918–1979* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), p. 58.
13. 'Student Numbers for History A-Levels, GCSEs, and Scottish Advanced Higher, Higher, and National 5 Exams, 2024', *Historical Transactions* (28 August 2024).
14. For one example see C. Schofield, 'Mangrove Nine Protest', *The National Archives: Education Sessions and Resources* (2020).
15. Thank you to Mike Maddison for supplying this information via email, 9 September 2024.
16. On co-production see S. Lloyd and J. Moore, 'Sedimented Histories: Connections, Collaborations and Co-production in Regional History', *History Workshop Journal*, 80 (2015), 234–48. For an overview of the tradition of heritage criticism see P. Mandler, 'The Heritage Panic of the 1970s and the 1980s in Great Britain', in P. Itzen and C. Miller (eds.), *The Invention of Industrial Pasts: Heritage, Political Culture and Economic Debates in Great Britain and Germany, 1850–2010* (Augsburg: Wißner-Verlag, 2013), pp. 58–69.
17. See, for example, 'Advisory Group on Legacies of Enslavement Final Report', University of Cambridge (September 2022).
18. E. Griffin, 'President's Letter to RHS Fellows and Members' (30 May 2024).
19. See, for example, D. Boffey, 'Academic Fury over Order to Study the Big Society', *Observer* (27 March 2011); P. Mandler, 'Long Live the Robbins Principle!', *HEPI* (18 October 2023); @PeterMandler1, post on X (31 July 2024).
20. See Royal Historical Society, *Race, Ethnicity and Equality in UK History* (June 2024).
21. Tilly, 'Democracy Is a Lake', p. 166.
22. J. Innes, M. Philp and R. Saunders 'The Rise of Democratic Discourse in the Reform Era: Britain in the 1830s and 1840s', in J. Innes and M. Philp (eds.), *Re-Imagining Democracy in the Age of Revolutions: America, France, Britain, Ireland, 1750–1850* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 115–21.
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Interlude A

New challenges: teaching Modern History in a ‘new university’

Iwan Morgan

In 1992 the Further and Higher Education Act enacted by John Major’s Conservative Government awarded university status to the UK’s thirty-four polytechnics with concomitant authority to issue their own degrees. Polys, as popularly known, had come into being in 1969 as part of the higher-education expansion undertaken by Harold Wilson’s Labour Government in response to the Robbins Report of 1963. Secretary of Education Anthony Crosland intended them to offer vocationally orientated education across a wide subject range, including science, technology, public administration, accountancy, law and journalism, to complement the academic focus of traditional universities.¹ The binary divide’s elimination partly reflected the growing conviction in government that investment in higher education regardless of disciplinary focus would benefit economic growth. More significantly, it embodied the realisation that the rapid growth of social mobility within non-manual classes would likely create exponential demand for higher education, something young people increasingly saw as inherently valuable for personal development and independence regardless of subject focus. As Peter Mandler has recently argued, the 1992 legislation marked the ultimate triumph of democracy over meritocracy in the modern development of UK higher education.²

Peter Mandler himself was deeply engaged throughout the 1990s with the hands-on challenges of democratising history provision in a new university. He joined the Politics and Government department of what was then City of London Polytechnic as it was preparing to sail into new

disciplinary waters as a renamed Politics and Modern History (PMH) department when the 'old' Poly became the 'new' London Guildhall University (LGU). Its experiences provide an on-the-ground case study of the exhilarations and tribulations of navigating that brave new world, which are deeply imprinted on this author's personal memory as then head of PMH.

PMH's development of Modern History accorded with London Guildhall's ambition to create new degree offerings in keeping with the academic ethos of a university. We saw ourselves as renewing provision of a subject once at the heart of the founding mission of LGU's earliest precursor. To promote moral and intellectual uplift through education, Reverend Charles Mackenzie had established the Metropolitan Evening Classes for Young Men in Crosby Hall, Bishopsgate, in 1848. At a fee of one shilling per session, students gained access to a broad curriculum that featured Classics, English, Mathematics, Natural Philosophy and History. However, Mackenzie did not have to worry about education-market pressures that his 1990s successors had to confront head-on.

City of London Polytechnic operated under the jurisdiction of the Inner London Education Authority, which regulated degree provision in its higher-education institutions to prevent excessive competition for students. This policy had protected its Politics programmes while prohibiting its development of History programmes that were the preserve of other polys. As a further regulatory safeguard, all polytechnic degrees were awarded under the aegis of the Council of National Academic Awards rather than the individual poly. PMH now found itself competing in a History-degree free market with almost every university, new and old, in the land and carrying an institutional brand with almost no name recognition in the discipline.

In essence, we had to decide what segment of the market to target and devise a programme that appealed to the kinds of students we hoped to attract. We had developed our Politics and Government provision twenty years earlier with a strong vocational core for students wanting a career in public administration, but we now aimed to develop an academic product that students had to find appealing for its own sake rather than for a specific occupational outcome. We had no illusions of enrolling well-qualified applicants whose A-level grades gave them access to well-established universities. Our target groups were Greater London-based mature students seeking belated entry into higher education, minimally qualified metropolitan eighteen- to twenty-one-year-olds who lacked good A-level grades, and school-leavers from our neighbouring boroughs (notably Tower Hamlets and Hackney), many from immigrant families lacking a tradition of humanities study at university.

Devising the Modern History single- and joint-honours programmes that appealed to these diverse groups was no easy matter. We also faced significant resource constraints when LGU experienced major financial problems that limited opportunities for new hires. By and large, however, we produced an attractive single-honours programme featuring first-year core units in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century European History and Historical Methods and wide-ranging level two and three options in British History, International History, American History and European History. The culmination of the programme was the 10,000-word dissertation that enabled students to research a viable subject of particular interest to them (rather than being tied to final-year special subjects, which did not feature in our provision).

Student numbers were solid but never spectacular as we built up the degree. Nevertheless, the overall quality of the student academic performance signified that our programmes had worthwhile outputs. We felt vindicated in having encouraged our students to set themselves the highest standards they were capable of and helping them to achieve these. Despite our recognition that good teaching would be the primary ingredient for such success, we also understood the utility of supporting that with strong research. Our achievement in being the top-rated History unit-of-assessment of any new university in the 1996 Research Assessment Exercise made students feel that they belonged to an academically reputable department rather than being remaindered cast-offs in the scholarly bargain basement.

In 1998 another research development promised further benefits when the Heritage Lottery awarded LGU funding to build a new home for the Fawcett Library, a major archive for women's history hosted by City of London Polytechnic/LGU since 1977. Its construction was on the site of a former wash house – with the façade preserved as a symbol of working-class women's past labours – in Calcutta Street, London E1. Granted an opportunity to enhance awareness of our programmes among female students, an increasingly important segment of the national higher-education market, we planned new provision in women's history, including the eventual development of a MA once the Fawcett Library reopened under its new name, the Women's Library, in 2002.

As a new century dawned, Modern History seemingly had a secure future at LGU. We now envisaged developing African and Indian-sub-continent history provision to increase our appeal to local communities. Events beyond our control turned such hopes into dust, however. In 2002, LGU merged with the University of North London to form London Metropolitan University. In the consequent restructuring, the Modern History section of our department was absorbed into the larger Humanities

department that existed in North London, while our Politics section was amalgamated with its North London co-disciplinarians. By then Peter Mandler had departed to take up a professorship at Cambridge, soon to be followed by other historians who disliked the top-down ethos of the new university's management and left to find positions in other institutions. London Metropolitan almost immediately encountered recruitment problems that made it difficult to balance the books, something that spelled trouble for History, which tends to do well in institutions that are generally in good financial health.³ Deciding that massive savings were required, the university's management terminated History provision as part of a broad programme of retrenchment in 2011. This foretold the fate of numerous high-quality History departments in new universities in the resource-constrained 2020s. Amid staff redundancies, History's presence at London Metropolitan took a final blow in 2012 when general cost-cutting led to the transfer of the Women's Library archives to the London School of Economics.

Several conclusions can be drawn from this case study of teaching History in a 'new' university in the 1990s. On the negative side, our experience ultimately underlined the reality that the academic quality of History provision mattered less than the money it brought into the institution in the calculations of new university chiefs. The positives are more significant, however. Firstly, teaching History in such institutions was perfectly viable if programme structures and content were made user-friendly for their specific student markets. This meant thinking of the subject more as a personal consumption good rather than a public investment benefit. Secondly, it was possible for widely published specialist historians with a strong sense of collegiate mission to democratise the discipline without compromising their own academic standards and research aspirations. Finally, and most importantly, the London Guildhall experience suggests that history's best guarantee of academic endurance, albeit in a smaller range of UK universities than seemed likely in the halcyon 1990s, is continuing adaptability to disciplinary democratisation. A sound future for engagement with the past depends on the capacity of practitioners to make it relevant to an increasingly diverse student body and to remain accountable to the interests of those they teach.

Notes

1. See, for example, E. Robinson, *The New Polytechnics* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968); J. Pratt, *The Polytechnic Experiment, 1965–1992* (London: Society for Research into Higher Education and Open University Press, 1997).

2. P. Mandler, *The Crisis of the Meritocracy: Britain's Transition to Mass Higher Education since the Second World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).
3. UK History, 'Student Numbers in History in UK Higher Education: Recent Trends', July 1, 2022. Accessed 16 September 2024. <https://www.history-uk.ac.uk/2022/07/01/student-numbers-in-history-in-uk-higher-education-recent-trends/>. In 2019–20, forty-seven per cent of all History students were taught in just twenty per cent of British universities.

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Part I

**VICTORIAN BRITAIN, PROGRESS
AND THE WIDER WORLD**

Chapter 1

Opium, ‘civilisation’ and the Anglo-Chinese wars, 1839–60

Philip Harling

There has long been broad agreement in the West as well as the East that opium was one of the chief causes of the Anglo-Chinese wars of the mid-nineteenth century (1839–42, 1856–60). Those wars were also about other things, of course. They were trade wars that reflected the clash between the British Empire’s commitment to global free trade and the Qing Empire’s commitment to controlling foreign trade through the highly restrictive ‘Canton system’.¹ They were culture wars that reflected the clash between the British Empire’s insistence on diplomatic equality between sovereign states and the Qing Empire’s insistence on treating all ‘barbarian’ states as tributaries that needed to acknowledge the supremacy of the Chinese emperor – even Britain, the global superpower of the age.² This diplomatic culture clash led to what Rutherford Alcock, British man on the spot in Canton (Guangzhou), indignantly called ‘a never-ending series of petty outrages and contumelious acts’ by the Qing mandarins in the treaty ports conceded after the first Opium War.³ Palmerston wasted no time in making these indignities a pretext to go to war a second time, and then to call a snap ‘Chinese election’ in 1857. Predictably enough, voters rewarded their prime minister’s bellicose refusal to make what he ostentatiously called ‘an abject submission to the barbarians’⁴ with a larger majority in the House of Commons. Thus did Britain’s expanding mid-century electorate sanction the idea that these wars provoked first and foremost by the Qing Empire’s contemptuous refusal to acknowledge Britain’s status as the world’s top nation and greatest civilisation.

The historical consensus, however, has long been that the two Anglo-Chinese wars of the mid-century were also wars about opium, the British imperial commodity at the heart of the Anglo-Chinese antagonism.⁵ And British imperial opium, far from being a token of ‘free-trade imperialism’, was processed through a highly sophisticated and tightly controlled Indian government monopoly.⁶ The East India Company and then the British Raj produced an enormous quantity of opium to meet a seemingly insatiable Chinese demand – from 100,000 kilograms of it in 1810 to 3.6 million kilograms by 1885. Opium contributed hugely to British India’s trade surplus, accounting for a third of all export earnings by the 1850s, and over a fifth of the Raj’s annual revenue by 1860. For much of the nineteenth century, moreover, opium was the only British imperial import for which Chinese demand was enough to help offset the trade imbalance caused by the even less satiable British demand for Chinese tea.⁷

In 1839, as part of its effort more strictly to enforce its longstanding anti-opium laws, the Chinese imperial government confiscated from British merchants and destroyed over 800,000 kilograms of opium, worth over £2 million at the time (£200 million today). This action triggered a British military invasion that ended in a humiliating defeat for the Qing empire. Opium smuggling grew apace, and after the second Anglo-Chinese war, the opium trade was effectively legalised through a schedule of tariff duties. Opium smoking became much more widespread in China in the second half of the century, as the legalisation of opium that had been forced by British arms fostered extensive poppy-growing and opium-processing within China itself. Domestic Chinese competition rather than ethical scruples eventually stopped the flow of Indian opium into China. The British could consent to the 1912 Treaty of Tianjin that finally declared an end to the Indian opium trade in China because by that time Indian opium had dwindled to a mere ten per cent of the Chinese market. By the early twentieth century, opium had turned into a Chinese problem in terms of production as well as consumption. Its solution owed next to nothing to Britain or to any other western power, and virtually everything to the new Communist government’s brutal suppression campaign of the early 1950s.

Given these facts, it is not surprising that in Chinese official history the Anglo-Chinese wars are treated as a conspiracy to bring the country to its knees through drugs and violence. It is no less surprising that to most western historians today, they are a particularly breathtaking example of Victorian hypocrisy – the chief proof that, as Philippa Levine notes, ‘the age of reform and of high morals was also quite palpably an age of rapacity’.⁸ Indeed, the Opium Wars provide but one of innumerable examples in which the ostensibly moral foundations of the early-Victorian state ‘at

home' led to dubious moral consequences 'out there' – within and far beyond the empire. Free trade was, of course, one of the central pillars on which those foundations rested. It built a *laissez-faire* shield round the Victorian economy, and in turn shielded the state and its stewards against the charges of sectional-interest brokerage that had long been at the root of the British radical critique of 'Old Corruption'. Free trade thus became central to the legitimacy of the metropolitan state in the age of reform. It evolved into a hallmark of disinterested governance on the part of a still narrow political elite that was held to account by a broader electorate after 1832, but which also held itself to account through a conspicuous dedication to 'good government' that patrician statesmen hoped might stave off an even more dramatic broadening of that reformed electorate.⁹ While free trade was regarded as a cardinal virtue at home, however, its global effects were far more destructive. It devastated the sugar economy of the British Caribbean by exposing it to open competition with Cuban and Brazilian slave sugar, for instance;¹⁰ it exacerbated catastrophic famines in Ireland in the 1840s and India in the 1870s and 1890s;¹¹ and it provided the chief rationale for the two squalid wars with China that were (paradoxically and hypocritically) fought in support of the Indian government's lucrative monopoly of the opium trade.¹²

There is still much to be understood about how foundational Victorian values such as free trade became corrupted as they travelled round the world – prime examples of what Priya Satia has memorably called 'the apparent ideological contradiction of "liberal imperialism"', which was 'grounded in a vision of history understood as necessarily progress-oriented', but which left in its wake a vast, global toll of 'wreckage' that 'was, famously, unintended'.¹³ With respect to the opium question, the corruption in practice of that purportedly liberatory shibboleth, global free trade, is all too plain to see. For the opium trade made the Victorian British empire the biggest, most violent narco-empire the world has ever known.¹⁴ But just as that trade was waxing, so too was Britons' tendency to justify their burgeoning empire on the liberal premise that it was a force for global good. Here was a seeming contradiction too glaring entirely to ignore. Thus the opium trade to China and the wars that facilitated it raised serious ethical questions, and, indeed, there was plenty of public debate about the opium issue in Britain during and between the wars. That debate tended to pit evangelical and missionary opponents of the opium trade against a broader and more disparate group of commentators who, to varying degrees, felt that the trade was legitimate and that opium was not as physically harmful as the anti-opiumists made it out to be, and who claimed various kinds of insider knowledge and expertise in advancing their arguments.

There are three points to stress here about the opium debate in Britain. The first is that there was significant disagreement about the physical effects of regular opium use. The second is that while anti-opiumists emphasised Britain's Christian responsibility to stop the opium trade, the trade's apologists stressed that the moral responsibility for opium use and abuse in China ultimately rested not with British or Indian producers but with Chinese consumers and the Chinese government. The third and final point is not about how the two sides in the British opium debate differed from each other, but about what they had in common. Both British critics and British supporters of the opium trade predicated their arguments on the assumption that China was significantly lower than Britain in the scale of civilisational progress, and that a viable solution to the opium problem meant that the Chinese government and the Chinese people had to become more recognisably 'British' in various ways.

On one level, of course, the opposing sides in the long-running British debate about Chinese opium voiced competing discourses of progress. To British anti-opiumists, the only guarantor of progress was the prohibition of the opium trade. To their British counterparts, progress rested on a fully open and legal opium trade limited not by government action but by Chinese moderation. But these British antagonists in the opium debate had one important thing in common – theirs was unapologetically unsolicited advice offered to the Chinese from what they all believed to be the top rung of a civilisational ladder on which they and their fellow Britons solely stood. In this sense, the opium debate in Britain provides some especially vivid examples of the plasticity of stadial logic – the habitual tendency to assign different peoples to different stages of civilisational development. This was the kind of logic the mid-Victorians instinctively reached for in justifying the British empire and explaining Britain's global ascendancy to themselves. As Peter Mandler has pointed out, British racism at mid-century remained more cultural and historicist than biological. But mid-Victorians comfortably settled into the opinion that the timescale for the 'improvement' of non-white peoples was much longer than their abolitionist parents had thought¹⁵ – whether those peoples were assumed never to have attained any of the features of proper civilisation, or who, like the Chinese, had once modelled some of those features, but had since purportedly regressed. Having ascended (as they thought) to the top of the civilisational order, mid-Victorian Britons pointed to the opium trade as an index of China's civilisational decline – often in ways that were meant to absolve Britain's deep complicity in that trade.

The different sides in the debate about the British opium trade to China were not weighed down by many facts. Even today, there is plenty we do not know about how morphine acts on the body.¹⁶ What was widely

recognised at the time was that opium was a potent analgesic, cough and fever suppressant, and anti-diarrheal. In the days before aspirin, it was widely used as a pain-killer, not only in Asia, but in Britain, Europe and North America. Opium was an active ingredient in Dover's Powder, chlorodyne, Godfrey's Cordial (a children's opiate based on laudanum) and several more of the West's most popular patent medicines, and its use was completely unregulated in Britain until the Pharmacy Act of 1868.¹⁷ It was no less widely recognised at the time that opium was highly addictive, and that withdrawal was accompanied by symptoms that could prove fatal, including severe stomach cramps, vomiting, excruciating pain to head and limbs, severe anxiety and paranoia. Impoverished addicts were especially vulnerable, as they often went without food to pay for their opium.¹⁸ In West as well as East, the line between the medical and social usage of opium was often blurred, and just like Thomas De Quincey, the 'English opium eater', many Chinese addicts would have first used opium as a pain-reliever.¹⁹

In India as well as Britain, opium was routinely ingested in the form of pills or drunk as a powder dissolved in liquid. Yet the opium 'problem' was thought to be peculiarly Chinese, because Chinese users routinely smoked rather than swallowed opium. In India as in Britain, the *smoking* of opium was 'generally looked down upon as a low and vicious habit'.²⁰ But there is no medical evidence to suggest that smoking opium is potentially more harmful than swallowing it. Indeed, the contrary is probably true, as most Indian opium brought into China as well as most domestically cultivated Chinese opium had a relatively low morphine content, and most of the morphia was either lost from pipe fumes or exhaled. It is impossible to gauge just how many Chinese smoked opium. Contemporary Chinese as well as British estimates varied wildly. But there is no doubt that over the course of the nineteenth century, its habitual use spread inland from the southern and eastern coasts, and from the elite to the peasantry.²¹ Peasants probably smoked on a massive scale no earlier than the 1870s, when domestic Chinese opium production began rapidly to increase. A widely accepted modern estimate is that by the 1880s perhaps ten per cent of the Chinese population at least occasionally smoked opium, with heavy smokers accounting for between one and three per cent of the population.²² But such nationwide estimates probably conceal more than they reveal, as anecdotal evidence from the last quarter of the nineteenth century suggests much higher levels of opium use in certain parts of the country (such as Shanxi or Gansu province) and among certain groups of manual labourers (such as rickshaw-pullers, boatmen and stone-cutters), for whom opium dulled the pain of prolonged physical labour and enhanced work capacity over short intervals.²³

There is no doubt that opium abuse posed a serious social problem in late-Qing China. But it is virtually impossible to measure the scale of the problem. And indeed, recent trends in opium studies suggest that the scale of the problem can be exaggerated. Far from a contradiction in terms, 'moderate' opium use was probably the norm, not the exception. Opium houses were not the hell holes of literary imagination, but often respectable sites of overwhelmingly male sociability (like the English pub or the American saloon) in which typically moderate amounts of opium were shared, along with tea, fruit and sweets; even some heavy smokers could continue in their habit for years without seriously impairing their health, provided they had the financial means to support it. Indeed, opium was often prepared in intricate rituals similar to tea ceremonies, in which the ceremonial aspect itself was a constraint on excessive use.²⁴ As Julia Lovell has noted, Qing subjects smoked opium for about as many reasons, in as wide a variety of settings, and to a similarly widely varying extent, as Europeans drank alcohol.²⁵

There were plenty of British observers at the time who insisted that the horrors of opium were greatly exaggerated. The barrister Samuel Warren, for instance, pointed out that anti-opiumists presented their readers with the spectre of 'millions of De Quinceys created in China, by the opium merchants, and represented in stages of suffering and frequency of death, infinitely transcending all that has been described by that accurate and minute . . . observer of his own sensations and sufferings'. Yet, as Warren pointed out, De Quincey himself was still giving 'the public frequent proofs of his being . . . alive, and in the full vigour of his extraordinary intellect', almost a quarter-century after his public admission of a prodigious opium habit.²⁶ Now Warren was a skilled casuist, in the pay of the leading British opium firm, Jardine Matheson. But several British military men who had served in China reached similar benign conclusions. 'From the experience which I had in constantly watching its use', noted Captain Arthur Cunynghame, 'I am of opinion that, taken as it almost invariably is, in great moderation, it is by no means noxious to the constitution, but quite the reverse', and did Chinese smokers 'no more harm than a moderate quantity of wine does to us'.²⁷ Like Cunynghame, Dr Duncan McPherson had served in the first Opium War, and he was one of very few westerners of his generation not only publicly to admit to having smoked opium himself, but to admit that it was an enjoyable experience. 'I had the curiosity to try the effects of a few pipes upon myself', he noted,

and must confess I am not at all surprised at the great partiality and craving appetite always present with those who are long accustomed to its use . . . [F]ancy is awakened, and creates new and bright

associations, the pleasurable scenes of former life are again recalled, . . . [and] the future is full of delightful anticipations, whilst the most difficult schemes appear already accomplished, and crowned with success. Under its operation every task seems easy and every labour light.

McPherson likewise concluded that moderate opium use was not only possible but beneficial. '[L]ike all other powerful stimulants and narcotics', he warned, 'it must ultimately produce effects injurious to the constitution'. But the Chinese certainly did not appear to him a nation of addicts. '[W]ere we led away by the popular opinion that the habitual use of opium injures the health and shortens life', he concluded, 'we should find the Chinese a shriveled, and emaciated . . . race. On the contrary, . . . we find them to be a powerful, muscular, and athletic people, and the lower orders more intelligent, and far superior in mental acquirements, to those of corresponding rank in our own country'.²⁸

Such benign views were countered by anti-opiumists, chiefly clergymen and missionaries, who routinely insisted that opium smoking was almost inevitably deadly. This was a view championed by the Reverend Algernon Thelwall, whose influential pamphlet on the *Iniquities of the Opium Trade* was serialised in *The Times* in 1839. Estimating that 'he who begins to use this baneful drug at twenty years of age can never expect to reach his fortieth year', Thelwall concluded that nearly two million Chinese had been 'murdered by the rise of the pernicious drug' within the past two decades – 'or 99,300 each year!' and that the current trade of 34,000 chests per year of opium into China was 'abundantly sufficient to ruin the health and shorten the days of no less than 2,980,000 individuals'.²⁹ Julius Jeffreys similarly estimated that there were at least three million opium addicts in China – a number equal to the entire population of Scotland – and that of these, at least one-third were in an 'unsalvageable' state of addiction.

[W]hat a picture we have here! 500,000 of our fellow-men in the last stage of a fatal vice – on the sure and short road to a wretched death and a dishonoured grave; spreading misery, and vice, and ruin on . . . hundreds of thousands of families which might else have been happy and comparatively pure. A million more hastening to fill up the blanks made by sudden death or utter beggary in the foremost ranks, and a million and a half pressing hard on the heels of these.³⁰

Other anti-opiumists shared Thelwall's conviction that 'opium-smoking is a sort of inclined plane, down which he who ventures to slide a little way is tolerably sure to go to the bottom'.³¹ The only significant difference among them was in judging the relative speed with which opium smoking would kill.³² Critics agreed that:

when once the Chinaman enters in this course, he finds himself on a plane inclined more or less according to the varieties of constitution; and the testimony of those who have had the best opportunities of judging is, that this descent is *all but inevitable* from the region of enjoyment that is said to be a terrestrial heaven to the depths of a terrestrial hell.³³

Even some observers who were fairly sympathetic to the anti-opium cause felt that these claims of opium's inevitable deadliness were seriously exaggerated. Benjamin Hobson, a medical missionary in Canton, was no friend of opium. He '[did] not fail strongly to advise the Chinese not to use it, both on physical and moral grounds', because 'its tendency is to debase the mind, to blunt the conscience', and 'unduly excite, and subsequently enervate, the brain and nervous system, now unequal to their functions, except by a constant supply of a false stimulus, which takes the place of wholesome food and drink'. Nevertheless, he noted that he saw many patients who had smoked it moderately for years, even decades, without suffering any serious ill effects. Indeed, he concluded, while 'opium is probably more seductive and tenacious in its grasp than alcohol, . . . I should certainly affirm that it was not so frequently fatal to life, nor so fruitful of disease and crime, as are intoxicating drinks in Great Britain'.³⁴ Apologists for the opium trade more insistently made the point that opium in China was like alcohol in Britain. 'It is, in fact, not the use but the abuse which is hurtful', noted the travel writer Hugh Murray. 'Men of all ages and countries solace their cares with some intoxicating material or other; and whether this be brandy or wine, as in France, ale, as in England, whisky, as in Ireland, . . . or opium, as in China, is a matter of comparative indifference'.³⁵

The abuse of alcohol, rare in China, was of course everywhere to be seen in mid-Victorian Britain.³⁶ And the abuse of alcohol was, according to this logic, more socially damaging than the abuse of opium, because while opium addicts typically reclined in a stupor, drunkards were all too likely to do violence to others. 'Smoking a little opium daily is like taking a pint or two of ale, or a few glasses of wine daily', noted Thomas Taylor Meadows, a government interpreter in Hong Kong.

Smoking more opium is like excessive brandy and gin drinking, leading to delirium tremens and premature death. After frequent consideration of the subject during thirteen years, the last two spent at home, I can only say, that, although the substances are different, I can, as to the morality of producing, selling, and consuming them, see no difference at all: while the only difference I can observe in the consequences of consumption, is that the opium smoker is not so violent, so maudlin, or so disgusting as the drunkard.³⁷

As the renowned physician Sir Benjamin Brodie put it, 'the opium-eater is in a passive state, satisfied with his own dreamy condition while under the influence of the drug. He is useless, but not mischievous. It is quite otherwise with alcoholic liquours'.³⁸ The lack of anything close to a consensus about the relative harmfulness of opium thus made it easier for Britons with ties to the opium traffic to justify that traffic to themselves.

British opponents and apologists were just as divided over the moral responsibility for the opium trade as they were over the relative harmfulness of opium smoking. The trade's foes insisted that the trade itself and the wars fought on its behalf were a national sin, a violation of Britain's Christian duties in the world. Thus it was that the evangelical leader Lord Ashley (later the seventh Earl of Shaftesbury) could not 'rejoice in our [military successes] in China; we have triumphed in one of the most lawless, unnecessary and unfair struggles in the records of history'. The young William Gladstone likewise noted in his diary that 'a war more unjust in its origin, a war more calculated to cover this country with permanent disgrace, I do not know, and have not read of'.³⁹ *The Times* itself likened the opium trade to the slave trade, and insisted that 'if this opium business were thoroughly and generally understood', a

high-toned public outcry like that which hunted down the abominations of the Guinea slavers, so long the opprobrium of British commerce, would forthwith rise up against it among all parties in politics and all denominations of Christians, till not a trace of it remained, except the remorseful recollection of its enormities.⁴⁰

When such an outcry failed to materialise, opponents of the trade noted the bitter irony that while the Royal Navy was intercepting slavers off the African coast, British opium clippers were smuggling tens of thousands of chests of opium into China each year, with the connivance of the British government. 'Where is the consistency and humanity of a nation', queried the American anti-opiumist Nathan Allen, 'supporting armed vessels on the coast of Africa to intercept and rescue a few hundred of her sons from foreign bondage, when, at the same time, she is forging chains to hold millions on the coast of China in a far more hopeless bondage?'⁴¹ Like the slave trade in Africa, critics argued, the opium trade was a drag on the growth of Britain's 'legitimate' commerce with China, as it was 'drugging to death the man whom we are hoping to see enter our shop daily, purse in hand!'⁴² Anti-opiumists likewise noted the irony that 'we grow poppy in our Indian territories to poison the people of China, in return for a wholesome beverage which they prepare, almost exclusively for us'.⁴³ While tea and silk were 'bringing increased comfort and happiness to

nearly every family in the United Kingdom', Britain's 'return for these valuable commodities is made chiefly of opium, and if we follow *that* article to the homes of its millions of consumers, we find that its mission is . . . to lure its victims to a premature and utterly wretched end, and to plunge their families into destitution'.⁴⁴

Finally, anti-opiumists insisted, the trade made it much harder to sell to the Chinese not only cheap manufactures, but also Christianity. 'It does seem most anomalous and contradictory', rued one evangelical periodical,

that the English should send to China cases of Bibles and chests of opium – the Bread of Life and deadly poison; that sons of Britain should wend their way to China as medical missionaries, as preachers of the Gospel, and translators of the Christian Scriptures, and that other men from the same land should carry to China this pestiferous drug . . . and grow rich by the gains of it.⁴⁵

Yet so it was, and 'every missionary informs us that the people point in scorn to the opium chest, and tell him to carry it away before he brings the Bible'.⁴⁶ The unnoticed irony here was that the same 'unequal' treaties that legitimated the opium trade in China also legitimated and greatly facilitated evangelisation efforts, as they granted British missionaries freedom of movement throughout China.⁴⁷

Apologists for the opium trade countered that the moral responsibility was all on the Chinese side, and laid the blame squarely on Qing misgovernment. First of all, they insisted, the Qing policy of opium prohibition was ineffectual. Given the seemingly insatiable Chinese demand for Indian opium, prohibition was simply an invitation to smuggling. Chinese smokers would have their opium one way or another, so it was far wiser to tax opium than to forbid it. 'Whenever habits induced a people to desire a certain commodity it was not in the power of a Government or Legislature to prohibit the general use of that commodity', the Earl of Albemarle told the House of Lords in defence of the opium trade. 'The only way to check the consumption of a deleterious article was by the diffusion of education or the imposition of moderate duties'. Prohibition simply led to rampant smuggling.⁴⁸ Other commentators suggested that the Chinese had to look no farther than India (or, for that matter, Burma or Ceylon) where opium-eating was tightly controlled by high excise taxes. Indeed, they added, the Chinese government's refusal to tax opium simply meant an even bigger windfall for the Government of India, which in the sale of opium to Chinese consumers had found its sole major source of revenue that did not fall on hard-pressed Indian peasants.⁴⁹ Thus the *Examiner* noted that the Qing government need only look at the windfall that the Government of India

reaped from the taxation of opium to conclude that it 'might easily by a moderate duty control and restrict the consumption of opium while they filled their exchequer' – yet the Chinese stubbornly refused to follow this Indian example.⁵⁰

Finally, according to the apologists for the opium trade, prohibition was a potent source of Qing corruption. The illicit trade in opium would have been impossible without the collusion of Chinese officials, who were up to their elbows in opium until the emperor's sudden clampdown in the late 1830s. '[T]he well-known venality of the mandarins is such', noted the British military man K. J. Mackenzie, 'that it will not surprise my readers when I say, that I *never* entered a mandarin's house without finding quantities of opium. This will show the error some have fallen into, in supposing that the practice is not universal, and that it is not connived at by government officers'.⁵¹ 'Instead of foreigners imposing upon the Chinese the importation of opium as a condition of trade', added another British observer, 'it was the Chinese themselves who insisted on its being supplied them. Boats belonging to the Custom-house at Canton were engaged in the traffic, and the Governor of Canton himself . . . employed his own boat to fetch it'.⁵² 'The connivance of the [Chinese] authorities . . . proceeded a step beyond mere remissness in executing the laws', added the Earl of Selborne. 'The cruisers of their preventive service were often directly engaged in the contraband traffic; their mandarins and custom-house officers received regular fees from native smugglers, and sometimes granted regular licences for the passage of the smuggled goods'.⁵³ The 'English opium eater' himself, Thomas De Quincey, concluded that 'China has . . . forfeited her claim to *any* redress from her long collusion with the wrongdoers, whom now in caprice she accuses'.⁵⁴ Britons had long since begun to congratulate themselves on having eliminated 'Old Corruption' within an administrative system that had reformed itself – and that was now answerable to a gradually democratising electorate of upstanding householders. So they shifted blame for the opium problem to Qing corruption and the mandarins' despotic misgovernment of a downtrodden people – a people who were, in any case, purportedly far from fit to govern themselves, because China had always been authoritarian and because too many Chinese could not so much as govern their own craving for opium.

The one thing that British critics and British supporters of the opium trade held in common was the assumption that China had badly regressed in the civilisational scale, and that the key to solving the opium problem was for the Chinese to develop some of the habits that had brought Britain to the top of that scale. There was widespread agreement that the opium problem was

proof of China's decline, as was the ease with which British and then Anglo-French forces defeated China in two wars. Julia Lovell and James Hevia have made clear what an indelible impression these conflicts, frequently dismissed as 'little wars' in the English-language literature, made on the Chinese, most notably in the destruction of the emperor's Summer Palace, whose ruins remain a vivid monument to colonialism.⁵⁵ ('When we first entered the gardens' of the Summer Palace, recalled the future Commander-in-Chief of the British Army Garnet Wolseley, 'they reminded one of those magic grounds described in fairy tales; we marched from them upon the 19th of October [1860], leaving them a dreary waste of ruined nothings'.⁵⁶) Gunpowder, paper-making, block-printing, silk-spinning, canal-building, navigation at sea, porcelain production – in all these and many more respects the Chinese had become civilised far in advance of Europeans. But these achievements were now centuries in the past, and the seemingly universal assumption was that China had long since been in decline while British civilisation continued to progress by leaps and bounds.⁵⁷

Thus Britons on both sides of the opium debate leant heavily on stadial logic in explaining the Chinese conflict to themselves, and assumed a civilisational hierarchy in which Britain had risen to the top as China continued to fall. While disinterestedness, 'good government', and broader political accountability prevailed at home, according to this reasoning, the Qing mandarins only grew more corrupt and despotic and the Chinese people more abject, servile, and themselves corrupted by opium addiction. The origins of both wars were matters of controversy in Britain. But once the shooting started, there was broad agreement that the Qing mandarins needed to be forced to negotiate with Britain as a righteous global hegemon rather than a mere tributary, chiefly because Britain had long since surpassed China in civilisational terms, loath though the mandarins were to acknowledge it. Thus, as *The Times* put it toward the end of the second Opium War,

the real question at issue appears to be whether we shall continue our intercourse with China on our terms or on hers. Our terms are those on which we communicate with all nations of the world – simplicity, frankness, hospitality, high principle, and equality, as between gentlemen. The Chinese, on the contrary, insist on keeping up the illusion of an unapproachable Sovereign, an irresponsible Central Government, and the not less startling illusion of an infinitely superior morality and sense of decorum.⁵⁸

By this time there was broad agreement in Britain that these Qing illusions needed to be shattered so that China might finally be 'opened' to external

trade and civilisational progress. There was similarly broad agreement that the Chinese needed to be forced to open more of their ports to western traders for the sake of their own civilisational advancement; the restrictive Canton system was a hallmark of Chinese stagnation in the dawning era of global free trade. For this reason, according to the British naval officer John Bingham,

it is consoling, under the sufferings which the obstinacy and perfidious conduct of their government compel us to inflict upon the people, to reflect that the contest now in progress must result in throwing open the vast empire of China to a more intimate communication with Europeans than has ever existed; and thus while it benefits both them and ourselves, in a commercial point of view, must, under God, be the means of elevating them from their present degradation to a state of real civilisation.⁵⁹

James Hevia has written powerfully about the violent ways in which the British taught 'English lessons' to the Chinese on the related subjects of British military hegemony and global free trade.⁶⁰ But there were 'English lessons' to be taught on the narrower subject of opium smoking, as well. Proponents of the opium trade insisted that the proper solution to China's opium problem was a time-tested British one: clean government and more efficient taxation. Smuggling would end and demand would fall to manageable limits if the mandarins stopped colluding in the opium trade and imposed an effective tax on imported opium.⁶¹ Finally, advocates of the trade argued, Chinese subjects no less than their rulers needed to be made to learn the self-restraint that was a hallmark of truly progressive societies; legalising opium would help them to do so, just as Britons had become more sober despite – perhaps in part even because of – the free and legal sale of hard liquor. The British foes of opium were no less committed to the virtues of what they perceived to be British self-restraint. But their arguments for prohibition were all too often predicated on the assumption that the Chinese were not capable of self-restraint – the government too corrupt and the people too depraved to be able to save themselves. As heir to an opium fortune turned anti-opium reformer, Donald Matheson, put it, 'the Chinese Government are morally and physically helpless—the Chinese people are equally so for throwing off this fatal habit, which has fastened on the very vitals of the nation, and under which they groan, destitute of the moral and Christian energy that might break its thralldom'.⁶² The English lesson here was that the British had to save the Chinese from themselves by prohibiting the export of Indian opium.

Of course, prohibition never happened. A tax on opium *did* happen. But when it finally came, in 1858, it proved to be yet another lesson in hypocrisy. The British extracted it at gunpoint, and insisted over strenuous Qing protests that it be set so low as not to impede the flow of Indian opium into China. That flow reached record levels by the mid-1880s, and it was greatly exceeded by the contemporaneous flow of domestic Chinese opium to which opium's *de facto* legalisation as a taxable commodity had quickly given rise. Small wonder, then, that from a Chinese perspective, the most obvious 'English lesson' to be learnt was that the British could never be trusted.

Thus it was that two of mid-Victorian Britain's salient moral virtues at home – free trade and clean and efficient government – bred violence, rapine and hypocrisy in Britain's relationship with China. The 'opening' of China to overseas trade was secured by British gunboats, and the opium that long remained by far the most popular British import in China was the product of a tightly controlled government monopoly. At the same time, clean and efficient government became a means to shift the blame for the opium trade from British force of arms to mandarin corruption. By such means were British virtues denatured in their long journey to China.

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Chapter 2

Archibald Alison's revolution

Ben Weinstein

Throughout the reform crisis of the 1830s and 1840s, Archibald Alison was among the most outspoken and persistent of all Cassandras. His pessimistic, sometimes even apocalyptic, visions of the post-reform future filled countless pages of *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, the leading organ of ultra-Tory doom-mongery (and referred to as 'MAGA' by its reactionary readers). During the 1830s, when *Blackwood's* hysteria over reform reached fever pitch, Alison was almost certainly the journal's most prolific contributor. Indeed, Maurice Milne has estimated that Alison published roughly one-and-a-half million words in *Blackwood's*, and that two-thirds of these words were devoted to political analysis and complaint.¹ Given his renown as an historian of the French Revolution, especially as author of the best-selling *History of Europe from the Commencement of the French Revolution in 1789 to the Restoration of the Bourbons in 1815* (1833–42), scholars interested in Alison have tended to focus on the ways in which European developments informed his analysis of the British reform crisis.²

This chapter acknowledges the importance of European comparisons in Alison's work, but also seeks to emphasise the centrality of extra-European, and especially imperial, developments and perspectives to Alison's anxieties about the post-reform future. In particular, I hope to illustrate Alison's fear that the 'English revolution' (a phrase that Alison used repeatedly in his work to describe the changes of the 1830s and 1840s) would initially be most damaging on the imperial periphery, before rebounding and inflicting even greater damage on metropolitan Britain. As he put it in 1833,

[revolution] will gradually spread from the extremities to the heart of empire. They [the great colonial interests] were the first to fall before the revolutionary tempest, which now whistles through the empire, just as the external leaves and branches are torn from the oak tree before the great arms are crushed off, which spring from the heart and are coeval with its first growth.³

This anxiety was compounded by Alison's more generalised concern over the permeation and corruption of metropolitan political culture by extra-European practices. Indeed, in both his historical scholarship and his political journalism, Alison drew heavily on a Scottish enlightenment world view that can only be described as 'orientalist'.⁴ Alison quite clearly worried that the purely domestic impacts of constitutional reform would be dangerous on their own terms. However, he also believed that the shocks initiated by these reforms would not be confined to the Atlantic archipelago. In fact, he was certain that these shocks would gain amplitude as they fanned out across the empire, to the point that they would fatally undermine the stability of the post-Napoleonic imperial order. But these shocks would also rebound, and when they did they would bring with them revolutionary changes to Britain itself which would fatally undermine, and ultimately 'orientalise', domestic institutions.

Much of Alison's work presented French, and indeed wider European, developments as valuable salutary lessons to contemporary Britain. Many of Alison's early contributions to *Blackwood's* drew explicit parallels between the French Revolutions of 1789 and 1830 and the contemporary British reform crisis, and Alison clearly invoked the French experience as a cautionary tale.⁵ Michael Michie's monograph, still the only book-length account of Alison's life and work, emphasises this dynamic, noting that 'Alison's analysis of the French Revolution, and his comparison of it with the development of liberty in Britain, provided him with the political framework within which all his subsequent accounts of contemporary politics were set'.⁶ Clare Simmons, meanwhile, has described Alison's history of the French Revolution as operating in what she calls the 'prophetic mode' of historical writing, aimed as much at addressing the British future as the French past.⁷ Moreover, the Franco-British comparison seems to have cut in both directions. In other words, in addition to providing a cautionary tale for contemporary Britain, Alison's reading of French developments was deeply informed by his understanding of the British present. As Simmons puts it, whatever Alison's original intentions in writing on revolutionary France, as he began to produce the early volumes amidst the 'days of May', the *History* became a clear 'Tory response to the Reform Act'.⁸ Revolutionary France

provided contemporary Britain with a useful warning, and contemporary Britain provided a lens through which to study the pathologies of revolutionary France.

But what kind of warning, exactly, did revolutionary France provide and, more to the point, how did Alison present this 'cautionary tale'? The answer is surprising, given the received status of Alison's *History* as an explicitly Tory interpretation of the revolution.⁹ Alison's analysis is not nakedly partisan in its tone, assumptions and judgements. In fact, his analysis rests on a series of tepid early nineteenth-century commonplaces that would have appealed as much to moderate reformers as to right-of-centre sceptics of reform. In addition to advancing a series of very well-established centrist pieties about the merits of constitutional balance, 'regulated liberty' and the organic development of institutions, the *History* endorses a Whiggish faith in the merits of progress through sensible and timely concession. In fact, Alison explains the 1789 revolution as a consequence of historic French *resistance* to timely and sensible reform and adaptation. The under-development of the French middle class, the centralisation of power in the French crown, the *political* weakness of the French aristocracy, and the general immiseration of the third estate are presented as evidence of, and indeed consequences of, the French failure to modernise. For this reason, the *causes* of the 1789 revolution, as presented by Alison, were not immediately applicable to the British context, where these political, social and economic failings were not operative, mainly due to the astute and successful constitutional settlements of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. This analysis would have met with much agreement at Holland House, Bowood and any of the other Whig salons so brilliantly brought to life by Peter Mandler in his *Aristocratic Government in the Age of Reform*.¹⁰

Unlike its causes, the revolution's outcomes were characterised by Alison as highly relevant to the British context, and indeed as a strong warning against any precipitous programme of reform. In his analysis of revolutionary outcomes, Alison emphasised the dangers of unintended consequences. In particular, he claimed that French 'moderates', who had initially been able to manage, if not completely thwart, plans for speculative change, lost all control over events during the earliest phases of the revolution. As developments spiralled out of control, radicals began to unleash all manner of untested, theoretical and synthetic changes, many of which, in the fullness of time, encouraged the emergence of Napoleon's despotism and consequently proved fatal to French liberty.¹¹ This Burkean analysis, in which democratic innovation comprises the most pernicious of all political sins, and ensures its despotic nemesis, had clear applications to Britain in the grip of a reform crisis. Indeed, it was precisely this

runaway momentum, paired with and fed by an increased willingness to entertain visionary projects for change, that Alison's early *Blackwood's* articles characterised as both the key dynamic of the French revolution and the chief danger facing Britain on the cusp of a self-inflicted programme of constitutional and economic reform.¹² Just as the excesses of the revolution had enabled Napoleonic tyranny, so the slower-moving 'English revolution' of the 1830s would also devour its children.¹³

If, in its Burkean dynamics, its celebration of constitutional balance, and its general antipathy to innovation, Alison's *History* offered very little deviation from conventional British accounts of the revolution, in one way it departed from the norm. Namely, Alison's work relates its analysis in a much more explicitly orientalist idiom than other early histories. I would suggest that this has been somewhat under-appreciated in the scholarship. Orientalist motifs are found throughout the *History's* ten volumes, and especially in volume eight, where Alison spends nearly 100 pages outlining the core features of eastern autocracy.¹⁴ One might even claim that 'oriental servitude' and 'Asiatic despotism' are among the key organising concepts through which Alison made sense of French developments. Not only, for instance, did Alison explain the impact of the August decrees by suggesting that they paved the road to 'Asiatic despotism', he also claimed that the 'slavery and decrepitude of oriental despotism' were the defining features of French political life from at least 1792.¹⁵ To what end, asks Alison in the *History's* tenth and final volume, did the revolutionaries murder the king, guillotine the nobility, destroy the church, confiscate estates and bankrupt the nation? Alison's answer is simply this: 'to exchange European for Asiatic civilisation'. Moreover, once debased in this way, France would struggle to restore its liberty. Should the wrongs of the revolution – especially the widespread confiscation of aristocratic property, but also the centralisation of state power – not be put right, the *History* confidently predicts that France will continue its decline into Asiatic dis-function. 'If reparation has become impossible', observes Alison, 'retribution must be endured; and that retribution, in the necessary result of the crimes of which it is the punishment, is the doom of oriental slavery'.¹⁶

As suggested above, Alison's reading of the post-Napoleonic European landscape was also deeply informed by orientalist themes and tropes. In fact, and rather counter-intuitively, he believed that the July Revolution, which had humbled the French throne and placed it under the influence of the haute bourgeoisie, would make France *more* prone to 'Asiatic' autocracy. In particular, Alison characterised the new revolutionary bureaucracy in terms familiar to later Victorian critics of French 'centralisation'. However, in Alison's hands this tendency to administrative

centralisation was framed as an oriental innovation, rather than any sort of native French practice. In an 1833 essay devoted to the failings of the French regime, Alison emphasised the post-revolutionary newness of centralised state power and he expressed his critique in thoroughly orientalist terms. 'New France', he claimed:

has not the elements within it to frame a constitutional throne. The people must remain slaves to the central Government, because they have destroyed the superior classes who might shield them from its oppression. Asiatic has succeeded European civilisation, and political power is no longer to be found independent of regal appointment. All superiority depends on the possession of office; the distinctions of hereditary rank, the descent of considerable property, have alike disappeared; over a nation of ryots, who earn a scanty subsistence by the sweat of their brow, is placed a horde of Egyptian taskmasters, who wring from them the fruits of their toil.¹⁷

In these kinds of comparisons, Alison drew heavily on what Sanjay Subrahmanyam has called 'the topoi of Oriental despotism: absence of laws, arbitrary royal power and a penchant for blood-lust, absence of private property', but he adapted these topoi to fit his European subjects.¹⁸ Consequently, as in the passage above, the pitiless centralised administrative state and its unaccountable bureaucracy could be substituted for the blood-thirsty Suba or Sultan. Just as all political authority in Asiatic regimes was said to be vested in the person of the sultan, unchecked by any kind of permanent aristocracy, so in the orientalist West all power emanated from appointed officials, unchecked by mitigating institutions or any form of local self-government. Perhaps nowhere is this schema clearer than in a fascinating 1835 essay entitled 'Whither Are We Tending?', which can be read as Alison's European-facing contribution to the 'spirit of the age' debate – taking its place alongside similar essays by Mill, Carlyle, Southey, Robinson and others. In this essay, Alison's vision of the British future is very explicitly informed by his understanding of an 'orientalised' French present. As in his *Blackwood's* essay 'France in 1833', Alison characterises the July monarchy as an over-centralised despotic bureaucracy. The faint and feeble glimmers of 'European liberty' that had survived the 1789 revolution have been entirely snuffed out by the revolution of the barricades and its aftermath. The essay marvels at the servility and apathy of the mass of French property holders in the face of the 'arbitrary and despotic' acts of Louis Philippe. 'In truth,' Alison asks, 'who can look at the present condition of France and seriously confirm that either liberty exists there, or that there is any reasonable prospect of its being re-established?'¹⁹ As evidence of the regime's tyranny, Alison

points to its bloody treatment of the Canut rebels, its suppression of the dissenting press and its eagerness to fill new prisons such as Sainte-Pélagie in Paris. Disturbing though these developments were in themselves, Alison's greatest concern was that they portended the British future. As the essay's title suggests, 'Whither Are We Tending?' is an exercise in political prophecy, and, to this end, it suggests that the reformed British state will necessarily follow the July monarchy's slide into centralised tyranny. 'Such is the state of France', claims Alison, 'and such, when the triumph of the revolutionists is complete, *will be* the state of England'.²⁰ The enabling development will be identical in both places: the centralisation of state power, the enervation of local, regional and peripheral interests, and the decimation of the conventional 'pillars of European liberty'. With these pillars of liberty destroyed, Britain will enter into a death spiral which can only end in 'the servility of oriental bondage', 'perpetual, unchanging despotism' and 'never ceasing slavery'. In seeking 'American equality', the reformers will find only 'Asiatic servitude'.²¹ In its closing paragraphs, the essay outlines Alison's remarkable vision of a far-flung future in which a completely orientalist Britain awaits its delivery from Asiatic slavery by a 'fresh race of northern conquerors' who will re-establish all the European virtues that have been so foolishly given away by the 'English revolutionists' of the 1830s.²²

But how, exactly, does Alison characterise these virtues of European liberty and civilisation? His analysis enumerates five 'pillars' of European freedom: lineal royal descent; a powerful hereditary aristocracy; strong church establishments; legislatures representing substantial property-owners; and self-selecting municipal corporations. Although Alison describes each of these pillars as vital to the maintenance of European liberty, the individual pillars are not presented as entirely virtuous in themselves. Rather, the value of each pillar is most fully realised in the company of, and in equilibrium with, the rest. When they stand together, Alison claims, these five pillars ensure the 'peculiar liberty' enjoyed by British subjects and act as 'barriers to arbitrary power'. Here, again, Alison celebrates 'balance', but also permanency. The durability of these pillars encouraged both social stability and steady, long-term civilisational 'progress'. If they are, as Alison claims, the most efficient support to the cause of liberty, 'they are so because they are permanent bodies, actuated by lasting interests, and not liable to be swept away by every sudden impression. Slow to move, therefore they are tenacious of purpose'.²³ In comparison, Alison finds that 'all these features are wanting in Asiatic civilisation', where the defining dynamic is an aimless transience caused by the complete centralisation of political authority in the person of the sovereign.²⁴

Yet, despite the ensemble quality of these five pillars, Alison clearly regarded one pillar as more important than the rest. A strong hereditary aristocracy is repeatedly characterised by Alison as the best, and historically the most effective, check against despotism, 'Asiatic' and otherwise. Throughout his journalism, and also in the pages of his historical scholarship, Alison presents a strong aristocracy as the defining feature of European civilisation and the 'ordered liberty' which it produces. Frequently, this European advantage is posed in explicitly orientalist terms. In calling on the Lords to reject constitutional reform in 1831, for instance, Alison leaned very heavily on such comparisons, reminding his readers that the Peers comprised an essential barrier against despotism, and going so far as to claim that:

*all that we now possess, or that distinguishes us from the Asiatic people – our laws, our liberty, our religion – have been preserved by the barrier of the feudal aristocracy . . . Compare the steady progress, regular government, and unceasing improvement, of the European states, with the perpetual vacillation, periodical anarchy, and general slavery, of the Asiatic dynasties, and the immeasurable benefits of a hereditary nobility must appear obvious to the most inconsiderate observer. The freedom which is now so much the object of deserved eulogium was nursed in its cradle by the feudal nobility.*²⁵

Again and again in Alison's writing, the absence of this aristocratic safeguard is characterised as counteracting any prospect of progress for 'Asiatic' polities, and the presence of this aristocratic barrier is characterised as underwriting European liberty.²⁶

Importantly, and rather predictably, not all European aristocracies were regarded by Alison as equally up to the task of defending ordered liberty. In particular, Alison uses the French example to explain the dangers of a corrupted aristocracy and the prospects, even at the heart of the European metropole, for 'oriental' backsliding. In Alison's telling, the ultimate cause of the 1789 revolution, for instance, lay quite clearly with an over-privileged, but also weak and servile, French aristocracy which could not stand up to the democratic challenge when it came. 'Not the corruption of the court, nor the infidelity of the philosophers,' claimed Alison, 'produced the Revolution – for these were of partial application; but the pride of the nobles, based on centuries of exclusive power, and intolerable in an age of rising improvement.'²⁷

By contrast, Alison refuses to blame the British aristocracy for their own prospective demise, which he instead attributes to the impact of the 1832 constitutional reforms. Despite their manful resistance to parliamentary reform, Alison characterises the British and Irish aristocracy as the very

first, and the most completely devastated, victims of the new constitution. The principal aim of the reform campaign, Alison claimed, was to undermine not only the direct political authority of the House of Lords, but also the indirect political influence of the nobility within the Commons. More than that, the 'movement party' sought to broadly de-legitimise the peerage and convince the public to regard them not as 'friends' or 'protectors', but as 'enemies' and 'oppressors'. In so far as constitutional reform embodied these notions, the 1832 reforms comprised a political but also 'a social revolution'.²⁸ Indeed, Alison regarded the popular mistrust of the aristocracy engendered in the course of the reform campaign as among the very worst outcomes of the reform crisis.²⁹ To Alison's mind this was doubly unfortunate because, unlike their corrupted French counterparts, the British aristocracy fully merited their prestige and power. Moreover, they had not bargained this power away, but retained it until the moment of their desolation.

Theirs was no long period of weakness or decay', observed Alison, 'no decline of virtue or failure of patriotism, no long and degrading history of the Empire, succeeding the triumphs of the Republic, sullied the overthrow of the British nobility. They fell in the fullness of their glory and their usefulness.'³⁰

The consequences of this assault on the political authority of the aristocracy could not have been more severe or far reaching. 'By the destruction of the power of the nobility', predicted Alison, 'we shall be handed over, first, to the horrors of popular licentiousness, and, next, to the tranquillity of undisturbed despotism. This is not a fanciful apprehension—it is the uniform history of the decay of freedom in past ages: future historians will probably point to the present Reform Bill as the first step in the extinction of British liberty'.³¹ Ultimately, the fall of the British aristocracy had placed Britain on the French road to oriental ruin.

The desolation of the aristocracy, and the extent to which this would orientalise the domestic political culture, was a key theme within Alison's critique of the reform crisis. However, it was by no means the only theme within this critique. Closely aligned with it was Alison's belief that constitutional reform would homogenise parliamentary politics and fatally undermine the representation of 'minority interests'. Indeed, the aristocracy was just one of the minority interests that would now be swamped by the crude majoritarianism of the reformed constitution.³² In Alison's telling, the richness, variety and capaciousness of the unreformed constitution, its ability to accommodate a wide range of antagonistic groups and interests, had been its crowning glory and had attracted the admiration of foreign observers.³³ The reformed

constitution, by contrast, would inaugurate the narrow and self-serving tyranny of the £10 householder. 'The circumstances which render the present reform utterly fatal to every interest of society,' observed Alison in August 1831,

are its being based on a uniform system of representation; the overwhelming preponderance which it gives to numbers over property; the undue majority which it confers to inhabitants of towns . . . the electors composed – or, what is the same thing, for the most part composed – of a certain class in society, cannot sympathise with other bodies; they are careless as to their complaints, indifferent to their welfare, swayed probably by an adverse interest.³⁴

Whereas 'uniformity of representation', as Alison called it, might be workable in young and relatively undifferentiated societies such as Jacksonian America – which Alison seems to have conceptualised as Jefferson's yeoman farmer ideal – or the Canadian colonies, it could only spell ruin for old, highly civilised European ones. British society, and by extension the British economy, was simply too fully developed, composed of too many distinct parts, to endure the supremacy of any one of these. Consequently, Alison's central complaint focused not on enfranchisement, but on redistribution and disfranchisement. In fact, Alison claimed to be eager for the constitution to absorb the middle class, which he held in very high regard.³⁵ He was even happy to create new parliamentary constituencies that would more fully and directly represent the interests of these new voters. Consequently, for Alison the true act of spoliation was not the enfranchisement of the £10 householders; it was, instead, the abolition of so many nomination boroughs and the disfranchisement of the interests represented through them. As Alison put it in 1831, anticipating the most egregious impacts of reform:

the numerous and weighty interests now represented by the nomination boroughs will no longer be able to raise their voice in Parliament: and if they are, a relentless majority, tied down by pledges to their imperious constituents, will dispose of their opposition as effectually as the resistance to reform has been overthrown in the present legislature.³⁶

Importantly, Alison's 'weighty interests' were almost entirely colonial. Miles Taylor has noted this type of colonial-centred objection to the reform legislation, and has also acknowledged Alison's role in articulating some of these objections.³⁷ Clearly, Alison was not alone in his concern over the disfranchisement of colonial interests. Yet, with the possible exception of Joseph Hume, he was perhaps the most outspoken figure on this

dimension of constitutional reform. Indeed, anxieties over the representation of colonial interests were central to Alison's critique of constitutional reform, and they ensured that this critique would be tied to his other great cause: protectionism. Throughout his journalism, Alison explains the dangers of constitutional reform through its impact on empire and imperial interests. First, he quite clearly tied the fate of imperial interests directly to the fate of the nomination boroughs. 'The most valuable feature of the British constitution', he observed in 1831,

that of affording an inlet through the close boroughs to all the great and varied interests of the empire, will be destroyed. The reform bill, in this view, may be entitled 'a bill for disfranchising the colonial, commercial and shipping interests, and for investing the exclusive right of returning members to Parliament in the populace of Great Britain and Ireland'.³⁸

Moreover, Alison nurtured this view long after the deed had been done. Writing seventeen years after the Great Reform Act, Alison recalled a prelapsarian time when the franchise had been 'multiform and various', when not only the colonial interests but also fledgeling political talent of all stripes found a 'ready inlet in the close boroughs', and when the virtual representation offered by these constituencies held together the empire 'in all its parts', not least by the protection that it offered to colonial commerce.³⁹

With the closing of this 'inlet' the colonial interests had been silenced, and the empire had been sacrificed at the altar of political economy and free trade. Indeed, Alison understood the removal of colonial commercial preference and protection to be a direct result, and indeed an intention, of the 1832 reforms.⁴⁰ His essay 'The Crowning of the Column and the Crushing of the Pedestal', written in the immediate aftermath of the abolition of the Navigation Acts, and his essay 'Navigation Laws', written a year earlier, make this abundantly clear, and both essays link policies of free trade and the death of colonial preference directly to parliamentary reform. As Alison put it in the 1848 essay, 'whatever we were in the days when Napoleon said it, we are now, if not a nation of shopkeepers, at least a nation *ruled by shopkeepers*. The colonies are entirely unrepresented'.⁴¹ The pecuniary interests of the new electorate trumped all, and these interests did not align with imperial preference. The decision to equalise duties on Canadian and Baltic timber, for instance, was explained by Alison as a direct consequence of the need to satisfy the wishes of the 'English ten pounders'.⁴² Even the East Indian interest, which presented itself as aligned with the free trade lobby in many respects, and which retained a kind of parliamentary influence through the many MPs who were also shareholders, was in Alison's view immediately compromised by constitutional reform.

The Charter Act (1833) was rushed through parliament with minimal debate. Alison interpreted this haste, and the lack of any real negotiation over the Charter terms, as a consequence of attenuated East India Company (EIC) parliamentary representation. Moreover, through its removal of the China monopoly, the Charter itself clearly condemned the Company to bankruptcy and eventual dissolution. This too was a consequence of the schedule A and B disfranchisements and the short-sightedness of the £10 householders.⁴³

Damaging though the 1832 reform *might* have been to Canadian timber merchants and EIC nabobs, when Alison complained of the abandonment of 'colonial interests' he generally meant the West Indian interest. In fact, Alison repeatedly singled out the post-reform ill treatment of the West Indies as uniquely unjust, once going so far as to claim that 'there is perhaps no parallel to be found, in the annals of human misrule and oppression, to the catalogue of injuries by which the dominant multitude in the British islands have alienated the affections of their West Indian possessions'.⁴⁴ As Michael Taylor has recently demonstrated, Alison should be counted as a member of that diffuse network known simply as 'the interest'.⁴⁵ In addition to characterising Alison's racial thought, Catherine Hall has also outlined Alison's personal and family connections to West Indian slavery. According to Hall, Alison's many rationalisations and justifications of the 'peculiar institution' were at least partly informed by these personal connections.⁴⁶ Regardless, Alison's strong critique of slave emancipation sat at the heart of his wider critique of the reform crisis. In addition to having been enabled by metropolitan constitutional reform, in Alison's critique slave emancipation was also a revolutionary act *in itself*, insofar as the freeing of slaves cleared the ground for immediate social dislocation and economic decline across the West Indies. In the first place, Alison argued that the West Indian slaves were not prepared for emancipation and that no period of apprenticeship, especially one of such brief duration, could possibly prepare them for what Alison called the 'desolation of freedom'. This critique (which was entirely conventional among pro-slavery lobbyists) was partly underpinned by Alison's aversion to abrupt social changes induced by legislation, but also by his racial ideology, which, although it advanced developmental, rather than essentialised, notions of African inferiority, nonetheless also emphasised the wide chasm of evolutionary time standing between 'Anglo-Saxon civilisation' and 'African barbarity'. In particular, Alison, like many apologists of slavery, emphasised the barbarous preference for sloth over toil, and anticipated that freed slaves would refuse to enter free labour markets, retreating into rude self-sufficiency. This choice, in Alison's view, would condemn

the freed slaves to degenerate into ever more profound states of barbarity. Atavism would sweep through the ex-slave colonies, resulting not only in social degeneration but also in economic ruin. Crucially, the economic ruin of the West Indies would also spell economic ruin for Britain itself, and in this way the revolution of the imperial periphery would be brought back to the heart of the empire.

More importantly, high-handed metropolitan mistreatment of the West Indies would, in Alison's view, inevitably provoke scepticism within the colonies over the value of the imperial relationship and possibly even lead to the empire's collapse. 'Amidst such an unstable and ruinous system [that is, the reformed constitution]', Alison wondered on the eve of reform, 'how is the colonial empire of Britain to be maintained? The answer is obvious – it will speedily be dismembered; and England, in addition to the destruction of its freedom and prosperity, will have to mourn the loss of its immense colonial possessions'.⁴⁷ In the case of the West Indies, Alison claimed that slave emancipation would inevitably drive the Caribbean colonies into the waiting arms of the United States, which would be only too happy to expand its slave economy.⁴⁸ Moreover, it was clear to Alison, as a strong protectionist, that schemes for free trade would only stiffen colonial resolve to sever ties. Alison's concern over the unravelling of the empire peaked in the aftermath of the Canadian rebellions and as apprenticeship ended, as his July 1839 *Blackwood's* piece 'Colonial Government and the Jamaica Question' makes clear. 'Colonial Government' expresses Alison's severe pessimism over the future of the empire, and his conviction that the unity of the empire will soon be 'put to the test'. Noting evidence of discontent spanning the empire – from the 'great trek' out of the Cape to the anti-transportation movement in New South Wales and the 'rebellious spirit of our Greek subjects' on the Ionian Islands – the essay claims that the fate of the empire rests on a knife edge and that a single 'shock of adverse fortune' might bring the whole edifice crashing down.⁴⁹ Surveying historical analogies, drawn mainly from the classical world, Alison concludes that 'colonial jealousy and discontent is the rock on which the great maritime powers of the world have hitherto split' and he fears that, in its myopic and selfish mistreatment of the colonial interests, Britain has learned nothing from this record of loss and decline.⁵⁰ Interestingly, however, colonial discontent, and even prospective colonial rebellion, was characterised by Alison as a consequence of more than just unpopular legislation and the material undermining of colonial interests. It was also a consequence of the new political *forms* initiated by constitutional reform. By simultaneously valorising parliamentary sovereignty and withholding actual political agency from the colonial legislatures, the reformed British state created a very powerful source of colonial

discontent. Again turning to historical comparison, and assessing the relative proximate causes of past imperial implosions, Alison observes that 'it is the denial to one part of the empire of the privileges and forms of government which are enjoyed by another ... which is often the more immediate cause of the rupture'.⁵¹ In other words, 'democratic' states cannot maintain autocratic empires. Yet, as one would expect, Alison was not in favour of extending democratic constitutions to the colonies. Nor, by 1839, did Alison believe that direct colonial representation within the Westminster parliament was possible. The fatal step, reforming the constitution in 1832, had been taken and no remedial effort could possibly save the empire once the £10 householder had been given the whip hand.

But, as the catastrophic vision mapped out in 'Whither Are We Tending?' suggests, the impact of the 'English revolution' would not be contained within the imperial periphery. Events there would necessarily rebound to destroy the imperial metropole itself, and the implosion would be spectacular. An old, highly civilised (that is, urbanised), increasingly overpopulated and sclerotic society such as that found in Britain required the counter-balance offered by 'young', under-populated and rustic colonial societies. Should these societies emancipate themselves from the colonial relationship, Britain's decrepitude would become more pronounced and more problematic. Indeed, Alison argued that Britain would suffer far more than her colonies in the aftermath of any such separation. As Alison put it when contemplating West Indian independence:

the old and the young are mutually dependent on each other; but the consequences of a rupture are likely to be more irreparable to a man of seventy than to a youth of fifteen . . . teeming with inhabitants, bowed down by debt, overflowing with capital which cannot find employment, and paupers who cannot earn bread, it [Britain] will never recover the loss of a portion of the empire, through which so large an artery of its heart's blood flows; and the ruinous policy which severs from its body so fair a member, will cause it to bleed to death, or to perish under the attempt to staunch the wound.⁵²

In Alison's analysis, Britain's status as a maritime power and a commercial nation only compounded its vulnerability. Indeed, historically, for such maritime states the loss of colonies has 'inevitably been the certain forerunner of approaching ruin'.⁵³ Consequently, while the undermining of the five pillars of European freedom would nurture the growth of popular despotism, Britain's ultimate desolation, and its final decline into Asiatic tyranny, will be sealed by the loss of its empire. Only once the colonial commercial interests have been sacrificed, the slaves have been freed, the China trade has been 'thrown open to the clamorous multitudes' and

the colonies have been lost will the 'English revolution' come to its inevitable conclusion.

Such extreme disasters will for certain produce one effect. All parties will become weary of distraction and suffering; the period, the inevitable period, will arrive, when the dominion of a firm hand will be required to staunch the wounds of the state. A Caesar, a Cromwell, a Napoleon will seize the sceptre, and military despotism close the drama of British reform. It will close after years of anguish and suffering; after the empire has lost its colonies, and with them its naval supremacy; after unheard of suffering has tamed our people, and the glories of the British name have ceased forever.⁵⁴

In some respects, Alison's concerns over an imperial rebound, coupled with his orientalist reading of French and British political developments, hark back to earlier panics over nabobism.⁵⁵ Like the eighteenth-century critics of Thomas Rumbold, Robert Clive, Warren Hastings, and others, Alison worried about the permeability of metropolitan culture by imperial vices, and he seemed to have believed in the vulnerability of metropolitan political norms and institutions to the challenges of the wider world. Like these critics he also emphasised that civilisational hierarchies admitted of 'progress' but also *backsliding*. There is no question that Alison's intellectual debts to Scottish enlightenment thinkers opened him to such an orientation. That said, it would be a mistake to understand Alison's critique as essentially a revival of older anxieties or as a fundamentally backward-looking response to reform. Rather, his anxieties were informed by the prospective demolition of the post-Napoleonic empire. Alison realised correctly that the 'pro-consular despotisms', the penal regimes and the slave colonies of the 'autocratic empire' would be the earliest casualties of reform, and he realised that 'reform' would be most extensive outside of metropolitan Britain. In other words, Alison's orientation was anticipatory rather than merely reactionary. Alison understood that the political economists owned the imperial future, and that the 'colonial reformers' would use the empire as a laboratory for their ideas. To a degree impossible in metropolitan Britain, the empire's 'archaic' institutions and practices would be swept away by a tide of modernisation and 'improvement'. The push would be for 'systematic colonisation', 'free' colonial labour markets and free trade. Moreover, reformed government at home would necessarily lead to 'responsible government' and liberalised political settlements abroad. The age of the despotic governor had passed, and a new generation of 'Anglicising' governors took their places. In India, a Benthamite governor-general pushed hard for reform and retrenchment; in the Cape, a Whiggish

Governor presided over what one historian has described as 'nothing short of a revolution' in that colony's administration;⁵⁶ in the Canadas, a 'radical' Governor, aided (to put it mildly) by prominent Benthamites, solved the problem of rebellion by granting self-determination and gerrymandering an Anglo majority. Indeed, the magnitude of the changes on the imperial periphery seems to have justified Alison's charge of 'revolution'. The reordering not only of colonial labour systems, but also of colonial law and administration suggests nothing less.⁵⁷ Undoubtedly, much of Alison's analysis of the reform crisis was overblown and even ridiculous. The empire did not unravel during the 1830s and 1840s. Rather, it grew and became even more central to British metropolitan prosperity. Alison eventually reconciled himself to this new empire and to reformed politics more generally. However, his critique as he navigated the reform decades is suggestive of the globalised alarm felt by some who lived through these changes. Fantastical though many of his claims were, and although many of his predictions never came to pass, there was some truth to Alison's analysis. Perhaps because of Alison's hyperbole, and because the empire survived its transformation, historians of political reform have not taken the scale of this transformation seriously enough?

Notes

1. M. Milne, 'Archibald Alison: Conservative Controversialist', *Albion*, 27.2 (1995), p. 420.
2. Alison's multi-volume *History of Europe from the Commencement of the French Revolution* was very widely read. According to Ben-Israel, it was the best-selling history of the French Revolution in the English-speaking world until nearly the end of the nineteenth century. H. Ben-Israel, *English Historians on the French Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), p. 152; M. Michie, 'On Behalf of the Right: Archibald Alison, Political Journalism, and Blackwood's Conservative Response to Reform, 1830–1870', in D. Finkelstein (ed.), *Print Culture and the Blackwood Tradition* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2006), p. 124; G.P. Gooch, *History and the Historians in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Longman's, 1913), pp. 304–5.
3. A. Alison, 'The First Session of the Reformed Parliament', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 34 (Nov. 1833), p. 795.
4. Alison's orientalism, and his application of it within his historical scholarship, was very likely informed by his close personal friendship with Dugald Stewart. For Stewart's influence in passing on Scottish enlightenment orientalism to Alison's generation, see J. Rendall, 'Scottish Orientalism: From Robertson to James Mill', *Historical Journal*, 25.1 (1982), pp. 43–69.
5. Alison published twelve such articles in *Blackwood's* between 1831 and 1833. Importantly, this cautionary tale was not exclusively aimed at policy-makers. Alison was also interested in producing a 'people's edition' of the *History* aimed at working-class readers. Michie, 'On Behalf of the Right', p. 124.

6. M. Michie, *An Enlightenment Tory in Victorian Scotland: The Career of Sir Archibald Alison* (East Linton: Tuckwell, 1997), pp. 130–58, esp. pp. 130–31.
7. C. Simmons, 'Disease and Dismemberment: Two Conservative Metaphors for the French Revolution', *Prose Studies*, 15.2 (1992), p. 208.
8. Simmons, 'Disease and Dismemberment', p. 212.
9. G.P. Gooch has described Alison's *History* as the 'bible of the Tory party'. Gooch, *History and the Historians*, p. 305.
10. P. Mandler, *Aristocratic Government in the Age of Reform: Whigs and Liberals, 1830–1852* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).
11. See especially A. Alison, *History of Europe*, vol. 3 (Edinburgh: William Blackwell and Sons, 1835), pp. 692–4.
12. See especially A. Alison, 'On Parliamentary Reform and the French Revolution, no. 5', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 29 (May 1831), pp. 745–83, and A. Alison, 'On Parliamentary Reform and the French Revolution, no. 6', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 29 (June 1831), pp. 919–68.
13. Here, again, Alison's analysis is entirely conventional. See J. Innes, "'Reform" in English Public Life: The Fortunes of a Word', in J. Innes and A. Burns (eds.), *Rethinking the Age of Reform: Britain, 1780–1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 71–97, and R. Saunders, 'Democracy,' in D. Craig and J. Thompson (eds.), *Languages of Politics in Nineteenth Century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 142–67.
14. A. Alison, *History of Europe*, vol. 8 (Edinburgh: William Blackwell and Sons, 1840), esp. pp. 513–32.
15. A. Alison, *History of Europe*, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: William Blackwell and Sons, 1835), pp. 292, 419; A. Alison, *History of Europe*, vol. 4 (Edinburgh: William Blackwell and Sons, 1835), p. 739; A. Alison, *History of Europe*, vol. 4 (New York: Harper Brothers, 1843), p. 95; A. Alison, *History of Europe*, vol. 6 (New York: Harper Brothers, 1849), p. 345; See also, A. Alison, *History of Europe*, vol 3 (Edinburgh: William Blackwell and Sons, 1835), p. 476.
16. A. Alison, *History of Europe*, vol. 10 (Paris: Baudry's, 1842), p. 269.
17. A. Alison, 'France in 1833', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* 34 (Dec. 1833), pp. 912–13.
18. S. Subrahmanyam, 'Frank Submissions: The Company and the Mughals between Sir Thomas Roe and Sir William Norris', in H.V. Bowen, M. Lincoln and N. Rigby (eds.), *The Worlds of the East India Company* (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2002), p. 77. For the use of 'oriental despotism' in the eighteenth century, see T. Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) and R. Travers, 'Ideology and British Expansion in Bengal, 1757–1772', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 33.1 (2005), pp. 7–27.
19. A. Alison, 'Whither Are We Tending?', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* 38 (Sept. 1835), p. 397.
20. Alison, 'Whither Are We Tending?', p. 399.
21. Alison, 'Whither Are We Tending?', p. 400.
22. Alison, 'Whither Are We Tending?', p. 400.
23. Alison, 'Whither Are We Tending?', pp. 391–2.
24. Alison, 'Whither Are We Tending?', p. 388.
25. A. Alison, 'The British Peerage', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 30 (July, 1831), p. 86.

26. See, for instance, A. Alison, *Essays: Political, Historical and Miscellaneous*, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1850), p. 142.
27. Alison, 'The British Peerage', pp. 82–3.
28. Alison, 'Whither Are We Tending?', p. 390; A. Alison, 'Hints to the Aristocracy: A Retrospect of Forty Years', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 35 (Jan. 1834), 70–71.
29. Alison, 'The British Peerage', p. 82.
30. Alison, *Essays*, vol 1, p. 207.
31. Alison, *Essays*, vol 1, p. 144.
32. A. Alison, 'The Fall of the Constitution', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 32 (July 1832), p. 56.
33. Alison, 'The First Session of the Reformed Parliament', p. 781.
34. Alison, *Essays*, vol 1, pp. 15–16.
35. For Alison's view of the middle class as a bulwark against revolution, see A. Alison, 'The Chartists and Universal Suffrage', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 46 (Sept. 1839), pp. 289–303.
36. A. Alison, 'On Parliamentary Reform and the French Revolution, no. 9: The Consequences of Reform', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 30 (Sept. 1831), p. 441.
37. M. Taylor, 'Empire and Parliamentary Reform: The 1832 Reform Act Revisited', in J. Innes and A. Burns (eds.), *Rethinking the Age of Reform: Britain, 1780–1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 295.
38. Alison, *Essays*, vol. 1, p. 25. Later in the same essay, Alison claims that 'schedules A and B are the real grave of the British empire'. *Essays*, vol. 1, p. 34.
39. A. Alison, 'The Crowning of the Column and the Crushing of the Pedestal', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 66 (July 1849), p. 111.
40. Alison's importance to the protectionist lobby, and the lobby's colonial orientation, is clearly acknowledged by A. Gambles, *Protection and Politics: Conservative Economic Discourse, 1815–1852* (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 1999).
41. A. Alison, 'The Navigation Laws', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 64 (July, 1848), p. 115.
42. A. Alison, 'Colonial Government and the Jamaica Question', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 46 (July 1839), p. 82. On the link between timber duties and constitutional reform, see also A. Alison, 'Colonial Neglect and Foreign Propitiation', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 46 (Dec. 1839), pp. 765–6.
43. Alison, 'The First Session of the Reformed Parliament' *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* 34 (Nov. 1833), pp. 792–5.
44. Alison, 'Colonial Government and the Jamaica Question', p. 79. See also A. Alison, 'Thirty Years of Liberal Legislation', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 63 (Jan. 1848), pp. 4–5.
45. Alison plays a very minor role in Michael Taylor's book of that title, but is more present in Taylor's article 'Conservative Political Economy and the Problem of Colonial Slavery, 1823–1833', *Historical Journal*, 57.4 (2014), pp. 973–95. M. Taylor, *The Interest: How the British Establishment Resisted the Abolition of Slavery* (London: Verso, 2020).
46. C. Hall, "'The Most Unbending Conservative in Britain': Archibald Alison and Pro-Slavery Discourse', in T. Devine (ed.), *Recovering Scotland's Slavery Past: The Caribbean Connection* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), pp. 206–24.

47. Alison, 'On Parliamentary Reform and the French Revolution, no. 9', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 30 (Sept. 1831), p. 446.
48. A. Alison, 'The West India Question', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 31 (Feb. 1832), p. 413.
49. Alison, 'Colonial Government and the Jamaica Question', p. 80.
50. Alison, 'Colonial Government and the Jamaica Question', pp. 75–7.
51. Alison, 'Colonial Government and the Jamaica Question', p. 82.
52. Alison, 'The West India Question', p. 415.
53. Alison, 'Colonial Government and the Jamaica Question', p. 75.
54. Alison, *Essays*, vol. 1, p. 69.
55. See T. Nechtman, *Nabobs: Empire and Identity in Eighteenth Century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).
56. J.B. Peires, 'The British and the Cape, 1814–1834', in R. Elphick and H. Gilliomee (eds.), *The Shaping of South African Society, 1652–1840* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1979), pp. 472–510.
57. L. Benton and L. Ford, *Rage for Order: The British Empire and the Origins of International Law, 1800–1850* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016); K. Boehme, P. Mitchell and A. Lester, 'Reforming Everywhere and All at Once: Transitioning to Free Labour across the British Empire, 1837–1838', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 60.3 (2018), pp. 688–714.

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Interlude B

Peter and the special relationship

Deborah Cohen, Guy Ortolano and Susan Pedersen

For more than four decades, Peter Mandler has enriched the field of British history on both sides of the Atlantic by serving as its preeminent cultural intermediary. In the 1970s and 1980s, plenty of British historians left the UK to make their careers in the US. Peter was unusual in tacking in the opposite direction: first as a youthful self-exile from Southern California who opted to study in Oxford, then as a young lecturer settling permanently in Britain during the grey Major years. Moving from the US to Britain gave Peter an opportunity to explain the Americans to the British and, just as importantly, to explain to American historians of Britain how British historians of Britain comprehended (or sometimes, miscomprehended and distrusted) their scholarly enthusiasms. If modern British historians working on both sides of the Atlantic understand each other better than they did forty years ago, it is in no small measure because Peter was our go-between.

Bridging a field carried out in two very different national contexts required cultural mediation of the most thorough sort. Even while tackling one aspect of British society after another, including the aristocracy, the stately home, the concept of ‘national character’, and secondary schooling, he was welcoming a steady stream of American waifs and strays who showed up on his doorstep. He was staying up to date on the latest from North America, freshening up what he knew from his always prolific reading (open book in hand while walking down the street) with first-hand participant observer interviews. To anyone who’d profited from Peter’s cultural translations, his luminous, empathetic and not uncritical *Return from the Natives* (2013), about Margaret Mead and her Boasian circle of friends who worked to render cultures mutually comprehensible and

respectful, seemed a perfect fit between author and subject. Long before Peter wrote on Mead, he had himself to learn the skills of ‘culture cracking’. And with the kind of generosity that Mead too showed, he passed that knowledge along.

When we and our peers came as young North American scholars back in the 1980s and 1990s to a country most of us didn’t know well, Peter was the person to whom we could turn. He told us about the National Register of Archives and the Newspaper Library at Colindale, he brought us to seminars at the Institute of Historical Research, he made introductions and connections, functioning himself as a kind of human equivalent of the Institute tea-room, and he explained the countless things that bewilder an American student: what ‘rates’ were and how land taxes were assessed, why Lord Palmerston was in the Commons not the Lords, and how Sir Edward Wood and Lord Irwin and Lord Halifax could all be the same guy. Peter made sure we knew that Pepys was pronounced ‘peeps’ and Cholmondeley ‘chumly’; he’d catch our mistakes and catch us again when we made more. Twenty years later, he would do the same thing for our students, explaining how the ‘record creator’ tab in the National Archives catalogue worked, how to use the Wellesley Index to find the names of anonymous authors, and that the ‘full text’ search function of the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* could, with one click, produce a network of intellectual influences that it once took a graduate student a year to compile.

But Peter didn’t just explain how to work in a foreign and still often clubby academic culture, he changed that culture too. If politics is made by those who show up, the profession is made – and changed – by those who serve it. None of us would have thought to join the Royal Historical Society, but when Peter became Honorary Secretary, join we did. We joined editorial boards and dissertation committees too, because he asked us. But Peter didn’t just work to deprovincialise British history in Britain; he made British history in North America less insular and self-regarding too. Peter came faithfully to the North American Conference on British Studies (NACBS) and he persuaded ever larger numbers of his UK-based colleagues to join him. By the 2010s, even when it was in Little Rock or Vancouver, about a third of the conference flew in from the UK.

This is how intellectual cultures are built and broadened; this is how academic worlds democratise. In an astringent and still much-cited article from 2004, ‘The Problem with Cultural History’, Peter argued that we, as historians, needed to be more methodologically serious in our approach to culture and to texts – to distinguish between intent and capacity, to track and not assume influence, to assess not just content but ‘throw’. But he also said we should take our collective responsibilities

more seriously – and we couldn't get mad at him, for he was doing just what he urged. If academic history will still have 'throw', it will be because we sustain the institutions – the journals, learned societies, book series, conferences – within which it can thrive. Canny marketing may have saved the English country house, but the merest glance at the history shelves of a high street bookshop (Churchill's cabinets, Churchill's paintings, Churchill's pets) shows the cost of letting the market decide what we research and write.

This might make the work of the historian today sound like a dreary slog from committee to archive to writing desk. Nothing could be further from the truth. For, in reviewing our lives-with-Peter over the past twenty, thirty and forty-plus years, what we mostly remember is how much fun it all was. Intellectual collaborations are exciting: it was fun for Susan to co-author an introduction to a festschrift for John Clive with Peter so that readers couldn't tell where one voice stopped and another started, invigorating for Deborah to dissect the *History Manifesto's* premises with him for the *American Historical Review*. But nothing was more of a blast, for Guy and Susan, than to join Peter in setting up the New York–Cambridge Training Collaboration in Modern British History (NYCTC), which would serve as a transatlantic framework for doctoral students at Cambridge, Columbia and NYU for the next decade.

It may have been that we were just getting older by then and knew what we were doing. We knew that PhD students in the US needed a 'cohort' if they were to learn their field and not be isolated. We knew that UK PhD students would benefit from exposure to their US peers' often comparative or imperial projects. We knew, too, that for the thing to work, meddlesome bureaucracies should be kept at arm's length; we would operate for a couple of years before our respective graduate schools quite figured out what we were doing. We were certain that, if we built the thing (with our students, full disclosure, doing much of the building), the money to run it would somehow materialise. We were lucky: Columbia's Heyman Center for the Humanities stepped up to fund the first workshop, and after that the other institutions stepped up too.

So, over a decade from 2015, a shifting group of nine faculty members, some sixty PhD students (about twenty at any one time), four post-doctoral fellows and half a dozen visitors met for monthly online book groups and work-in-progress sessions, annual (or sometimes more frequent) in-person workshops, meet-ups at NACBS and the occasional summer get-together. Half of the ten in-person workshops were held in New York, half in Cambridge. Students workshoped dissertation chapters, participated in roundtables and endured professional development sessions. They also went out on the town.

Professionally, the collaboration did what was hoped, fostering connections and networks. The New York students now had go-betweens of their own when they came to the UK for research; they and British students collaborated to propose NACBS panels. But with its receptions, meals, drinks, walks and tours, NYCTC was always a social and collegial enterprise as much as an intellectual and professional one. Growing above all out of Peter's friendships at Columbia and NYU, it built upon long-shared conversations, collaborations and exchanges. And by creating a venue for a new generation to do the same, NYCTC fostered both knowledge and friendship.

Many faculty members – the initial planning group of Mandler, Pedersen and Ortolano, but also Lucy Delap, Jon Lawrence and Helen McCarthy, and more recently Mike Joseph, James Stafford and Ren Pepitone – helped keep the project afloat. But Peter was always its impresario. He was fundraiser, convenor, host, roundtable chair, dinner companion, tour guide and toastmaster. He would explain the architecture of the Sidgwick site, arrange an off-hours visit to the David Parr House, or give his North American guests the full Grantchester experience. Few will forget the time he was persuaded (though, it has to be said, he didn't require much persuasion) to address a closing dinner from a curious pulpit, looming high above the hall in Queens' College. 'Do you think we could convince Peter – oh, there he goes!'

Part II

**CULTURE, CONSUMPTION AND
DEMOCRATISATION IN BRITAIN SINCE
THE NINETEENTH CENTURY**

Interlude C

Olden times and changing times: museum interpretation and display in twenty-first-century Britain

Rebecca Lyons

Peter Mandler's *The Fall and Rise of the Stately Home* is remarkable for many reasons – the breadth of source material and scholarship, the flow of readable text and apposite observation, and the demonstrable interrelationship of politics, the public and shifting attitudes to cultural heritage. The tensions between maintaining or celebrating the past, while acknowledging the present, are carefully contextualised in each phase of Mandler's chronological survey, noting how the moments of 'survival' or success for country houses often occurred when owners or trustees could align with shifting public or political discourse.

How might this play out in the debates and discussions surrounding the preservation and interpretation of a historic cultural institution today? Not a country house, though it was once a splendid aristocratic townhouse, the case study for this interlude is the Royal Academy of Arts, London (RA), founded in 1768.

The history of the RA has much that delights visitors, reminiscent of Mandler's early Victorians, fascinated with 'Olden Times', though it is also a place of contemporary practice, led by artists who comprise the membership of Royal Academicians. The institution, founded in an era of monarchical beneficence and authority, was hierarchical, male-dominated and closed, with new Academicians voted into an exclusive company by their artistic peers. Teaching in the RA Schools was based around the ideals of a classical past given visual prominence in the preservation and display of plaster-cast copies of Greek and Roman sculptures as aids for

learning. Embracing the classical tradition and those artists that followed on from it, through Michelangelo and the High Renaissance, was a seemingly immutable pathway, promoting the idea of what English education, indeed civilisation, should be.

By the late nineteenth century, more progressive reforms around the teaching of art in the Schools, the admission of women students, the election of 'foreign' honorary Royal Academicians, and the formulation of loan exhibitions had done much to advance the RA mission, but its narrative still remained linear, fixed and exclusive, its history selectively curated. This is what Stuart Hall notes as a process of 'canonisation' where those with authority dominate, and where the institution develops 'a deep investment in its own "truth"'¹ rather than welcoming the discussion, debate, discord and renegotiation necessary to evolve.

Mandler carefully observes the dangers of blurring the vicissitudes of over 200 years of country house history into a 'single unwavering vision', reminding the reader that public opinion shifted dramatically at various points covered by his study, rather than this public seamlessly and continuously appreciating heritage. But for Mandler, although it may be 'fickle' and 'changeable', the public is still characterised as a unified group.² Hall's lecture, delivered two years later, approaches the idea differently, noting the impossibility of characterising the public as a single group 'imagined as . . . culturally homogeneous and unified'.³ If, he argues, the experiences of all the constituent parts of the nation are to be successfully addressed, then the idea of the nation must be something constantly under reconstruction – there can be no 'one-size-fits-all cultural identity' and certainly not for the diasporic people who constitute Hall's primary focus. Hall goes on to advocate for ways in which those involved in the interpretation of heritage locations can revise and recreate their own histories, considering a multiplicity of differing and even contradictory histories with a view to bringing those traditionally viewed as from the 'margins' into the centre, while simultaneously allowing for their difference to be respected and preserved rather than assimilated.

Forward twenty years from both texts and the words of Hall resonate even more strongly amid public discourse beset by (sometimes manufactured) culture wars, Conservative government overreach and political manoeuvring. Neil MacGregor noted recently that the National Trust had a multiplicity of sites and therefore could better tell a multiplicity of histories.⁴ He spoke of the envy of the museum director who has only one physical location but seeks to invite the possibility of multiple voices. (It should be noted that even within the National Trust this remains challenging – single-narrative interpretive strategies risk becoming a kind of

heritage pot-luck in terms of whose (his)story is selected and whose left aside.)

As the Royal Academy has evolved into a twenty-first-century public gallery and exhibition space, we face the same challenges as many heritage organisations. How do we create a more inclusive space and bring to light narratives of those excluded or erased? And how do we form connections with the audiences of today whose own journeys may involve experiences of cultural neglect? The hurdle of the elite location, of imposing architecture and an exclusive tradition puts much in the way, even setting aside the additional barriers of affordability. Our work engages with many of the same challenges as public history in recent decades – as we lead on acquisitions, display, interpretation and collection care, public programmes and learning activities, we are constantly reviewing the balance of power between those creating the narratives and those ‘receiving’ them. And, in the context of recent world events, we have begun again reassessing how within that we tell our own story.

Ongoing discussions about how to evidence both our decolonial and database research in the gallery has focused on strategies for inviting multiple perspectives into the spaces – considering authorship of labels, proposing multiple choices for voices on audio tours and sustaining an engaging and accessible public programme of events for different audiences – providing a variety of ‘ways in’. In a museum context this is also enabled by ensuring that learning and interpretation teams hold equal expertise to curatorial colleagues, or indeed by redefining the skill set necessary for twenty-first-century curatorship and cultural leadership. As an institution led by artists, these strategies can also be artist-led, opening up even more new and imaginative ways of engaging multiple publics.

In the exhibition programme, such thoughts about institutional histories, moving the margins into the centre and centering the voices of Black and Brown artists, coalesced in the ‘Entangled Pasts’ exhibition that opened in January 2023, the curatorial team comprising voices from outside and within the Royal Academy, artists, academics and curators, led by Professor Dorothy Price. Critically and curatorially acclaimed, the show provided sustained reflection on colonialism and the art establishment, viewed through the lenses of artists themselves, reflections in film, in paint and in sculpture on the experiences of people of colour through time, forcibly uprooted, enslaved, categorised, coerced and controlled by the forces of empire and those who led it, painted it or hung representations of it on their walls.

This was a bold exhibition in a politically conservative moment. Overall visitor numbers were lower than usual, and few sponsors felt comfortable

entertaining guests in the spaces. Much of the imperial and institutional history was difficult to witness and in times of reduced household finances and post-pandemic reluctance to return to culture, the ‘public’ did not engage so readily in paying for this subject matter. This could be viewed as a sobering financial outcome for an organisation wholly independent of government funding but there was great institutional pride in this show, the audiences who came overwhelmingly enjoyed the experience, and the numbers of attendees who identified as people of colour far exceeded the usual percentages on record. Our unwavering commitment remains in sustaining that engagement for other exhibitions while also working to convince a more uncertain demographic that the exploration of other histories and heritages invites their participation, that there is joy to be found in discovering and accommodating new narratives.

The way forward for cultural and heritage institutions such as the Royal Academy will require the uncovering of more connections that link the personal to the historical (or art historical) to connect through creativity, and through imagination, so that we participate in reinventing what Hall calls a more ‘global version of our island story’.⁵ Though Mandler’s work did not explicitly engage with diasporic or global majority histories, his conclusions in *The Fall and Rise* called for that same openness, asserting that our institutions would only survive through adaptability, noting in his final sentence that: ‘other treasures, created and valued by humans, must, like humans, evolve to survive’.⁶

Notes

1. S. Hall, ‘Whose Heritage? Un-settling ‘The Heritage’, Re-imagining the Post-nation’; text of a keynote speech delivered on 1 November 1999, reprinted in S. Ashley and D. Stone (eds.), *Whose Heritage? Challenging Race and Identity in Stuart Hall’s Post-nation Britain* (London: Routledge, 2023), p.16.
2. P. Mandler, *The Fall and Rise of the Stately Home* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), p. 417.
3. Hall, ‘Whose Heritage?’, p. 16.
4. Conference, Victoria & Albert Museum, ‘The Public Country House: “Treasure of Quiet Beauty” or Site for Public Histories?’, 16–17 May 2024.
5. Hall, ‘Whose Heritage?’, p. 21.
6. Mandler, *Fall and Rise*, p. 418.

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Chapter 3

Painting for pleasure: the rise and decline of the amateur artist in Victorian Britain

Sally Woodcock

The colourman and his amateur customers

In 2004, Peter Mandler made ‘Three Modest Proposals’, aiming to strengthen cultural history, the field that his own work had helped define. The first of these was to champion the work of others, ‘those toilers among us who do research into the mechanisms for the production and diffusion of culture’, noting ‘a tendency to look down our noses at people who study production and diffusion rather than content’.¹ This hierarchy was felt in other fields, art history’s combination of aesthetic appreciation and economic value making it particularly susceptible to elitism, as John Gage had observed a few years earlier: ‘for the most part the work of the technologists of art has remained obscure, partly because of intellectual snobbery, and partly because of the meagreness of the surviving records, which is one consequence of it’.²

This chapter combines Mandler’s mechanisms of production with Gage’s obscure technologists in surveying the amateur customers of one of London’s leading manufacturers of artists’ materials, Charles Roberson. The Roberson archive, recording the firm’s commercial activity from its foundation in 1820 until 1939, is housed at the Hamilton Kerr Institute in Cambridge. It preserves the credit accounts held by the firm’s customers. They came largely from the middle and upper classes as opening an account with the company required a reference of credit worthiness based on good character, which, as Margot Finn has noted, was ‘constituted in

significant part by tradesmen's continuous valuation and revaluation of their customers' status and social connections'.³ This represented a barrier to poorer or poorly connected customers, likely to include a substantial proportion of amateurs, who would instead have bought materials casually over the counter as needs demanded and means allowed. While it would be unrealistic to expect evidence of significant working-class participation, either amateur or professional, in the records of a firm that explicitly aligned itself with the upper artistic echelons, it should be noted that other sources also provide scant evidence of a working-class presence in the art market, excluding the porters, frame-makers, colour grinders and models upon which the business of art depended. Nevertheless, Roberson's eventual accommodation of middle-class amateurs entering a market hitherto dominated by businesses, professionals and the upper classes is a clear indication of gradually broadening artistic participation, foreshadowing the more comprehensive democratisation of the arts after the Second World War when economic, social, political and cultural changes facilitated an upsurge in amateur artistic activity among 'ordinary men and women with enough spare cash to pursue interests outside their "workaday obligations"' and 'artists watchful of price rather than quality would come to rule the direction of the colourmen's chemists'.⁴ Roberson is the only British colourman known to have preserved any personal customer accounts and there is therefore a danger that they may be seen as unduly representative of the market as a whole, and their abrupt cessation at the outbreak of the Second World War might introduce an artificial watershed into a possibly more gradual equalisation of the amateur market for art. Despite these potential shortcomings, the archive's long arc of more than a century of commercial activity offers evidence for relative shifts, if not absolute changes, in the art materials market's direction of travel and evidence for a greater diversity of participants and relationships in an era more usually associated with the development of artistic elites. While imperfect, Roberson's archive ably demonstrates that 'half an understanding' is indeed better than none.⁵

Despite the requirement for references, Charles Roberson was to find that the rich were no less feckless than the poor. His 'bad debts' lists were populated by outwardly respectable married women, clergymen and minor aristocrats who failed to settle their accounts, along with the usual crowd of perpetually impoverished and disreputable defaulters, both amateur and professional. Wealthy customers were self-confident, used to being waited upon and had the means and connections to be able to move from place to place at ease, making them sometimes fickle and difficult to pin down. An undated letter from retired Colonel Edward Bethell, who was

living with his wife and six servants in Hyde Park Square in 1911, illustrates the imperious attitude of some of Roberson's customers, both towards their colourman and their debts:

In future when suffering from idea [sic] that I may want to pay your account please send same to Mrs O.I. Bethell at the above address . . . This does not mean that I want to pay your account now. Far far from it! . . . Next year you may get it settled but not now. So do not please waste perfectly good postage stamps on sending it to me till you really feel you must. You might try in March but earlier than that I fear you will draw a blank which is of course regrettable very.⁶

Customers like Bethell relied on their tradesmen being 'hostages to traditions of consumer activity rooted in credit, character and connection' and, no matter how fashionable the art world became, the social status of the artists' colourman remained tainted by proximity to both trade and paint, occupying an uneasy position at the intersection of polite society, cultural activity and commerce.⁷ While Roberson's expertise was respected by his fellow colourmen and professional customers, to his amateur patrons he may have been just another deferential shopkeeper. If so, his earliest cash book, with its entries for Mr Decided, Mr Writer, Frenchman, Mrs One Arm and both Mr and Miss Stink, may reveal something of the private thoughts of the Victorian colourman behind his courteous facade.⁸

As so much amateur art was ephemeral, derivative or destined for the dustbin, amateur artists can be difficult to follow in a field where significance is largely based on surviving works. Roberson's commercial records document their customers' purchases, regardless of ability or professional status, thereby providing a unique point of departure in tracing a sector of Victorian artistic activity that is otherwise difficult to locate. The names and addresses recorded in the archive allow individual amateurs to be pursued in other sources, including census returns, exhibition lists and institutional memberships. While very few amateurs can be associated with surviving works of art, the degree of technical and material detail in many of Roberson's account entries compensates for this, providing transactional evidence of artistic intention, even if this was not always followed through to execution. Surveying Roberson's amateur customers therefore liberates Peter Mandler's 'throw' from dependence on extant works of art, casting it backwards in time before the first hesitant brush-stroke, when a work was just an idea, and propelling it forwards into Britain's vibrant, crowded and sometimes merciless art market, when the amateur artist developed aspirations to exhibit as the nineteenth century progressed.⁹

The undulating amateur art market

When Charles Roberson opened his shop on Long Acre in 1820, his first account ledger was largely populated by professional artists and businesses.¹⁰ Only three amateurs can be firmly identified, two clergymen and an unmarried woman, establishing a pattern of vicars and spinsters that was to recur for the remainder of the century. By the time of his death in 1876, things had changed. The amateur customers were so numerous that he had to run two series of account books, reserving ‘petty ledgers’ for his less prestigious, yet-to-be-successful or non-professional customers. While Roberson’s active customer base had increased from 52 to 1,235 accounts over the course of his working life, the proportion of non-professional customers had expanded exponentially, denoting the amateur artist’s increasing involvement in the contemporary art market as it rose to its 1870s peak¹¹ (see Figure 3.1).

While numerous, amateur customers were not always profitable; more than 2,000 customers opened an account, only to place a single order and never return. Of the amateur orders, three-quarters were placed by women. It is noticeable that there was a sizeable increase in these fleeting customers between 1869 and 1873, after which their numbers quickly collapsed, which may suggest that the early 1870s represented the height of the period of interest in art for the uncommitted ‘dabbler’ (Figure 3.2). Some of the most strident criticism of amateur works overcrowding professional exhibitions coincided with the amateur peak seen in Roberson’s records, culminating in 1889 when several hundred artists made a formal request to reduce the number of paintings that non-members could submit

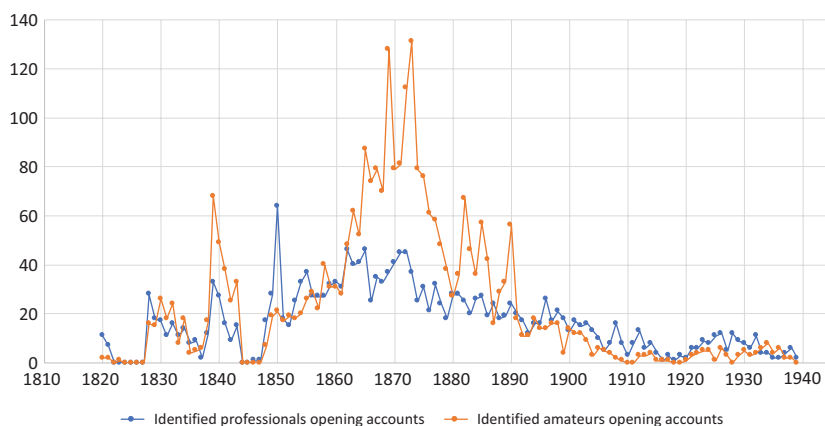


Figure 3.1: Professional and amateur artists opening new accounts with Roberson, 1820–1939.

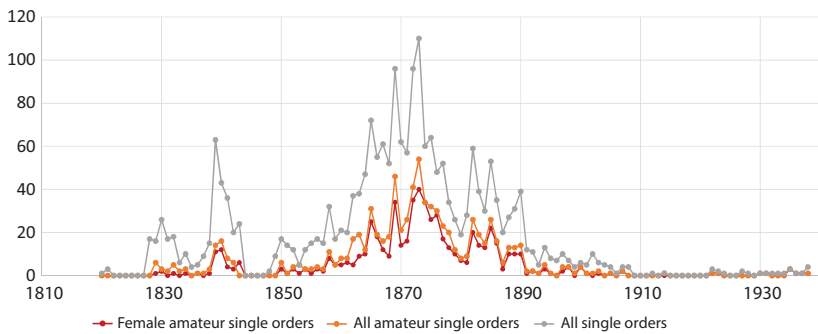


Figure 3.2: Single-order accounts, by date.

to the Royal Academy's summer exhibition.¹² Professional artists felt that they were in danger of being overwhelmed by a tide of mediocrity at a time when their own markets were coming under threat. Roberson's records, showing professionals to be outnumbered by amateurs by more than three to one at the height of the amateur boom, provide some justification for their fears.

The impulse behind this increase in amateur artistic activity has been attributed to the convergence of a number of economic, social and technological trends, many with origins in the previous century, that contributed to the creation of a dynamic market for entertainment and leisure activities.¹³ The increasing availability of time outside work and the means to enjoy it as a result of higher wages, the concentration of population in urban centres and the development of better transport networks across the country all benefited the amateur art market. Developments in reprographics and the popularity of pictorial magazines also meant that a new and more widely dispersed group of customers could be reached with relative ease, offering an unprecedented opportunity to inform, inspire and advertise.¹⁴

Amateur customers offered colourmen the potential to develop a mass market in entry-level materials as well as an opportunity to sell luxurious products to those who were wealthy enough to afford them. In making art fashionable and pursuing royal patronage they aimed to excite the desire of the expanding middle class to emulate the artistic amusements of the aristocracy. In making materials cheaper, cleaner and more convenient they could hope to attract a new pool of purchasers with diverse artistic interests who required a wide range of products. The expansion of the middle classes and their new-found interest in art could also be exploited by lower-ranked professional artists, many of whom were Roberson customers, thereby indirectly benefiting the colourman. These artists may

not have been able to secure the patronage of the aristocracy, but would gladly furnish the homes of those further down the social scale. Thus, middle-class consumers of art provided a market for middle-rank producers and, through attendance and subscription, financed the exhibitions and publications on which all classes of artist came to depend. As her husband had been both President of the Royal Academy and Director of the National Gallery, Elizabeth, Lady Eastlake was in a good position to understand the prevailing art market, observing in 1870 that the influx of the commercial and trade classes resulted in 'the note-book of the painter, while it exhibited lowlier names, showing henceforth higher prices'.¹⁵

The expansion of the middle-class market for pictures and the rising prices that were peaking as Lady Eastlake was writing encouraged Roberson to concentrate on cultivating and accommodating the professional artist, largely disregarding the commercial opportunities offered by the firm's non-elite customers. When asked for materials such as china or poster paints Roberson politely expressed regret that they did not stock such things and referred enquirers elsewhere, ignoring any burgeoning impetus towards cultural democratisation among their customers, even when this only came aslant from the middle classes rather than truly 'from below'. While Roberson's confidence must have seemed justifiable at mid-century when almost ninety per cent of account turnover came from the main ledger customers, with famous names adding prestige by association, by the final quarter of the nineteenth century, with declining professional sales, this approach would seem less prudent. Dragging their feet when faced with growing numbers of middle-class amateurs left Roberson already behind their competitors as the market began to shift further towards mass participation. Their rivals Winsor & Newton and Rowney, both quick to accommodate the amateur market, had recognised the need for diversification far earlier than Roberson and continued to develop products aimed at children, students, amateurs and women throughout the lean interwar years as well as expanding internationally to establish new markets. Unlike Roberson, they were therefore in a good position to offer a new class of amateur artist materials at a lower price when a broader mass market for artistic creativity developed in the second half of the twentieth century, increasing their market share by directing new and inexperienced customers towards cheaper and occasionally gimmicky products by way of judicious advertising campaigns and product innovation.¹⁶ Rather than moulding their market in a similar way, Roberson only seemed willing to adapt to the demands of democratisation when they became impossible to ignore, leaving the firm cruelly exposed to a turbulent, shrinking professional market after their founder's death in 1876.

Selling pictures and the materials that made them during ‘the most drastic deflation in the memory of man’ between 1873 and 1896 was never going to be easy.¹⁷ Agricultural depression had encouraged the break-up of country house art collections and large numbers of paintings came onto the auction market from the early 1880s.¹⁸ An influx of Old Master paintings benefited neither Roberson nor their professional customers and the fall in prices for contemporary art was noted with regret by those old enough to have experienced the height of the art market. As the professional art market started to decline in the last quarter of the century, Roberson’s amateur market initially looked as if it might be the answer to the colourman’s difficulties, with a marked increase in new amateur accounts between 1860 and 1890, in contrast to the gradual decline in new professional accounts (Figure 3.1). However, the amateur accounts of the 1880s were of considerably shorter duration than professional accounts opened at the same time. Even if Roberson could manage to attract amateurs to offset the reduction in professional spending, these new customers were less valuable to them in the longer term. The firm experienced a final bounce in customer numbers in 1890, likely in response to the company opening a ‘retail’ branch on Piccadilly, positioned next to the Ritz Hotel and Royal Academy in an attempt to attract wealthy amateurs – an ambition it very briefly appears to have achieved (Figure 3.3).



Figure 3.3: Roberson’s ‘retail branch’ in temporary accommodation on Piccadilly circa 1904, during the construction of the Ritz Hotel, its eventual location. Author’s collection.

Although the additional income that amateur artists generated prolonged Roberson's twentieth-century agony, it was insufficient to prevent the firm from slowly limping towards liquidation in 1987. By contrast, Winsor & Newton, who were active very early in the amateur sphere, survived into the twenty-first century occupying a dominant position in this and other sectors of the art market. Clearly, Roberson failed to capitalise on changing customer demographics when compared with Winsor & Newton's astute handling of new markets; however, Winsor & Newton were unusually successful in the sector in their speed of growth, scale of operations and longevity. The combination of Henry Newton's business acumen and artistic knowledge with William Winsor's chemical expertise may have ensured that Winsor & Newton would eventually outshine their older rival, whether or not Roberson had expeditiously embraced the china paints, printing kits, glitter and glue made for the craft-inclined child, the artistically disposed homemaker and the Sunday painter. Their failure to do so proved to be to their detriment, but there is some justification in noting that if Roberson could not keep up with Winsor & Newton, nor could anyone else.

Without comparable records for other companies it is not possible to tell whether all colourmen faced an equally stringent contraction in business in the final quarter of the nineteenth century, although it is unlikely that any were completely able to escape the impact of 'the universal depression in Trade' noted by Winsor & Newton in 1885.¹⁹ The downward direction of travel experienced by colourmen reflects evidence from studies of the other end of the art market, looking at sales of pictures by living artists and the rise and collapse of prices.²⁰ While picture prices did not directly affect amateurs, a subdued art market, periodic economic depressions and perhaps also the availability of alternative forms of collective amusement such as cinema, which started to develop in the Edwardian period, may have combined to make art a less attractive activity for the leisured classes in the first half of the twentieth century.²¹ If emulation of the aristocratic lifestyle had in part inspired the Victorian middle classes to take up art at the start of the century, the contraction of aristocratic wealth and an increase in hostility towards the privileges of the few may have encouraged them to look elsewhere for inspiration at its end.²² Perhaps making things started to seem outmoded in the 'Machine Age' as a new generation questioned why they should make the things that they could now so easily buy, as they enthusiastically took up the new pastime of shopping.²³ Public museums and galleries also experienced a decline in visitor numbers at the dawn of the twentieth century, ascribed variously to the impact of cinema, the new-found respectability of music

halls, the attractions of motoring, the popularity of spectator sports and the appeal of shopping as a leisure activity.²⁴ If the public were no longer interested in forming even a passive audience for art, it was perhaps too much to expect them to continue as active creators. Colourmen were not to experience another boom in amateur customers until the years following the Second World War, albeit too late for Roberson's records to reveal whether, second time around, the firm was any better able to accommodate a broader class of customer seeking self-fulfilment through artistic endeavour.²⁵

The amateur/professional interface

Distinguishing between amateur and professional artists remains a subject of debate in the twenty-first century and was not always straightforward in the nineteenth.²⁶ Roberson's amateur customers encompass such a broad range of individuals with such widely varying occupations, intentions and abilities that finding shared characteristics indicative of amateur status can be challenging. The 'rapid conversion of the whole population into Art-Students, Art-Teachers, Art-Artists' was noted by William de Morgan, painter, ceramicist, novelist and Roberson customer, who caricatured the popular perception of what constituted a professional artist in his 1907 novel *Alice-for-short*:

Has this man a Studio? Has he one or more Easels? Does he buy large quantities of colours, and get professional discount? Does he employ real live Models? Does he send to the Academy? If he does no one of these things, he evidently isn't an Artist – if he does them all, or any fair proportion of them, he evidently is.²⁷

While De Morgan is overstating his point for comic effect, in the same year *The Chemist and Druggist*, the journal of the pharmacy trade, debated the problem of professional discount relating to photographers, usually making prices one third cheaper, along similar lines:

. . . what is to prevent every amateur customer who sells a few prints (and what amateur does not when he gets the chance) from posing as a professional and claiming his discount? Neither can one distinguish a professional as a man with a studio, for many photographers who do nothing else for a living have no studio. On the other hand, there are many amateurs who possess studios but who are not and will never be professional photographers in the sense that they get their whole living by the practice of their art.²⁸

The blurring of professional boundaries suggested by De Morgan's satire and the chemists' dilemma is confirmed in Roberson's accounts. Amateurs might be able to afford discrete studio addresses, whereas professionals frequently had to combine living and working spaces, especially if they were female. Easels were often hired as required by professionals, whereas amateurs might treat artists' materials like any other consumer product and purchase everything they needed at the outset. Table easels, although most frequently found in amateur accounts, might also reflect the opportunities for employment that professional women found as watercolourists, illustrators, wood engravers and miniaturists, their easels chosen to suit the size of work undertaken and their limited working spaces. While Roberson quite frequently transported their amateur customers' paintings to the Royal Academy, many professional artists never showed work there at all. Roberson's ledgers, with their last orders and settling of accounts, often give an impression of regularity and finality, but artists' working lives could be unsettled and sporadic, with women in particular crossing the interface between amateur and professional as they combined domestic duties and familial responsibilities with a dogged desire for their work to be seen. Therefore, beyond the limited and exclusively male membership of the Royal Academy, there is no single reliable identifier for Roberson's professional customers and no universal indicator at all for their amateur peers beyond their financial independence, not being solely or primarily dependent on art for their living.²⁹ As much as twenty per cent of Roberson's account customer base falls into this category, but with notably different experiences depending on gender, social position, income and ambition.

Women, men, aristocrats, exhibitors

At the start of the nineteenth century, the amateur artist was generally identified in both fiction and the press as young, female and, with the exception of governesses, rich. Images of young women with palettes, sketchbooks and portfolios often appeared in fashion plates and art was essentially depicted as a harmless but largely unproductive private activity for the upper classes, often regarded as improving a girl's chances in the marriage market.

The accidental drowning of a young artist in the lake at Winkfield Park in Berkshire in 1813 illustrates the essentially private nature of this period of amateur art:

A young lady, Miss Blane, daughter of Sir G. Blane, having gone out early in the morning, as she was accustomed to do, to sketch views of the place, happened to seat herself upon a small stool, which she carried with her, close to the head of the pond, and her seat being insecurely fixed, she fell from it into the water. The body was not found till past ten o'clock . . . She was a lady in the bloom of youth, endowed with the most rare accomplishments and finest dispositions.³⁰

Not everyone found the acquisition of artistic accomplishments laudable. Sarah Lewis, in her book *Woman's Mission* of 1839, regarded it as a waste of female resources, and questioned 'how few attain even a moderate proficiency'.³¹ However, until amateur artists chose to participate in the public arena where they were open to scrutiny and professional criticism, a lack of proficiency was no reason to stop painting.

As the century advanced, the appeal of art expanded to become a pursuit of the middle as well as the upper classes. Looking back at the nineteenth century from 1929, Wanda Neff observed that 'not only the aristocracy, but both the upper and lower middle classes protected the females of their households from any kind of useful employment' by encouraging their pastimes.³² To counter accusations of frivolity and insignificance, those with a vested interest in the expansion of this market promoted art as an opportunity for serious study. This was endorsed by the publisher and artists' colourman Rudolph Ackermann in his periodical *The Repository of Arts* early in the century, which conveniently directed his primarily female readership to his shop of the same name on the Strand, from which he sold artists' materials, predominantly watercolours, prints for copying and manuals of instruction. He later provided a library and, once he had firmly identified his market, a 'feminized tea shop'.³³

Despite the popular image of the amateur as female, Roberson's records indicate that it was not until the mid-1860s that there were more female than male amateur account holders, the former almost evenly divided between married and unmarried women, challenging the stereotype of the painting spinster. However, the period's restrictions on female economic agency may have camouflaged the presence of greater numbers of female customers participating at an earlier period.

These invisible women include several of Roberson's longest-standing customers, with the only surviving work of Miss Louisa Charlotte Hobart, who held an account with Roberson for sixty years, being the stained-glass window she designed for the parish church of Nocton, Lincolnshire, where her father was vicar and, until his death, the holder of Hobart's account.³⁴ Similarly, while Mildred Holland appears to have been an active amateur

artist all her life, her only known work is the ceiling of Huntingfield church in Suffolk, which she spent much of the 1860s painting from scaffolding (Figure 3.4). Despite working her way through 225 books of gold leaf, it was Mildred's husband whose name appeared in Roberson's account books. While it was common practice for fathers, husbands or brothers to act as account holders on behalf of their female relatives, this left women, who were already offered so little space in the wider art world, also invisible in Roberson's records.



Figure 3.4: Mildred Holland's ceiling paintings in St Mary's church, Huntingfield, Suffolk. Photo: author.

Mildred Holland's autograph, large-scale, in situ, multi-media ceiling was atypical of the work women, and especially women amateurs, were encouraged to pursue. Caroline Jordan contrasts the freedom female amateur artists experienced in British colonial territories with the situation at home:

... the 'gendered genres' of miniature, flower, and picturesque landscape painting were extensively marketed to and practised by women amateurs because of the lower levels of skill, scale and investment they required. In contrast to the more prestigious options potentially available to male artists, women amateurs dealt in portable watercolour and pencil drawing (the modest subsidiaries to academic oil painting), in miniatures rather than full-blown portraits, in landscape and floral studies rather than history or figure painting, and in sketchbooks rather than on canvas.³⁵

This description is borne out by patterns found in the purchases made by the majority of Roberson's amateur female customers. Watercolours predominated, along with materials for miniatures, pastels, drawings and outdoor sketching. While professional artists, male or female, largely concentrated on one specialism, the amateur female repertoire was less focused. Materials for the minor arts of fan, china and lampshade painting, painting on silk and enbiseau cards were purchased almost exclusively by amateur women. While an impression of indiscriminate and unfocused activity emerges from many of Roberson's amateur accounts, the serious amateur female painter, who might under different circumstances have had aspirations to a professional career, is difficult to identify, no matter how talented or hardworking she may have been. Until amateur women chose to follow the lead of pioneering female professionals and participate in Britain's burgeoning exhibition culture as exhibitors as well as visitors, they would continue to have to paint invisibly and in private.

By contrast, most of Roberson's amateur male customers had paid occupations, about 500 of them identified by their title or rank as doctors, clergymen and military and naval officers. The difficulty of fitting a serious interest in painting around professional life can be seen in the account of Sir Robert Porrett Collier who, while a Member of Parliament, had to wait until the summer recess for his painting trips, regularly getting his colour box cleaned and ordering materials in early July before leaving for the Alps.³⁶ Despite the constraints of earning a living, the less prominent Hertfordshire farmer and brewer Samuel Lucas left 120 oil paintings and over 700 watercolours at his death, a substantial output for a man painting in his spare time.³⁷

While there were those who waited until retirement to pursue their interest in art, the majority of Roberson's male amateurs pursued art and a career simultaneously, opening their accounts with Roberson while still of working age. There is little evidence of amateur interest developing into professional activity, with the possible exception of the house-painter Thomas Todd in Ulverston. An amateur watercolourist, Todd's interest in art appears to have developed into a business, selling artists' materials alongside house-paint and describing himself as an 'artist and picture dealer' in retirement.³⁸ The son of a butcher, Todd is one of very few working-class amateurs to be identified in Roberson's records.

These men did not pursue the multiple, serial interests suggested by the purchasing patterns in amateur women's accounts, instead following the lead of professional male artists in concentrating on oil and watercolour painting, along with occasional printing and modelling, making their choices according to masculine norms rather than pursuing anything intrinsically amateurish. For men, there was no equivalent of china painting.

As for women, the boundary between male amateur and professional life could be blurred, with some military and colonial amateurs also being engaged in mapping and recording landscape and ordnance as part of their professional duties. Similarly, clergymen often worked as tutors and drawing masters and physicians illustrated medical textbooks before the use of photography, often in a professional capacity.³⁹ Roberson's military, medical and clerical customers were joined by prominent landowners, manufacturers, lawyers, diplomats, politicians, brokers, bankers, writers, musicians and actors, with those lower down the social scale being more difficult to identify, although a former valet and lodging house keeper, an insolvent schoolmaster, the superintendent of Kingston railway station and an indebted clerk in the Excise Office can be firmly identified.

While Roberson initially supplied more male than female amateurs, by the mid-1860s there is a significant increase in the number of women joining the company's books and between 1865 and 1920 three times as many female amateurs as male open new accounts. Despite this, the number of male amateurs buying their materials from Roberson in the first half of the nineteenth century challenges the Ruskinian assumption that the Victorian art world was populated by amateur women deferring to professional men.⁴⁰ For an artists' colourman, customers, whether male, female, employed or otherwise, were to be encouraged to take up a pastime that demanded the purchase of consumables on a regular basis as well as

offering, in the words of the colourman Reeves, 'a cheerful and agreeable relaxation from the toil of labour to the man of business . . . and to those of no profession . . . [it] fills up with great advantage the distressing vacuum of an unemployed life'.⁴¹

While the distress of the jobless rich is debatable, the upper classes did indeed establish art as a fashionable pastime, spearheaded by Queen Victoria and Prince Albert, both enthusiastic amateur artists.⁴² While the overall majority of Roberson's aristocratic account holders were female, the ratio of aristocratic women to men remained approximately equal until 1872, with a significant reduction in titled male accounts thereafter. It is tempting to suggest that the dawning 'Long Depression', which began to be felt in 1873, may have called male landowners away from their easels to concentrate on more pressing financial matters, leaving their wives and daughters to carry on sketching, but this remains conjecture.⁴³ Roberson exploited their royal connections as far as they could, obtaining the royal warrant once their customer Princess Alexandra was queen. They also promoted the sketchbook she had consistently ordered as being supplied to 'H.M. the Queen, H.R.H. the Princess of Wales, H.R.H. the Princess Louise, and other members of the Royal Family' (Figure 3.5).

Roberson's titled customers tended to use the firm's framing, mounting, hanging and restoration services more frequently than others, in part on account of living in large houses full of paintings. Some aristocrats also bought considerable quantities of studio furniture and large canvases, suggesting that they had a dedicated space for painting, and placed orders comparable to those of a professional, but the majority of aristocrats made purchases that differed little from those of middle-class amateurs. Titled women reflected the popularity of sketching, watercolour and miniature painting among women in general, while male aristocrats were more likely to be engaged in oil painting, along with the majority of Roberson's male customers. While the selection of medium by gender has many exceptions, Roberson's records suggest that it holds true to a degree for both recreational and professional artists from all backgrounds.

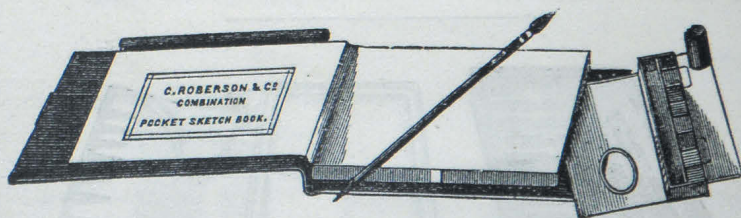
While Roberson's accounts confirm that the socially ambitious amateurs had plenty of aristocratic models to emulate, as the nineteenth century progressed they would also look to the careers of professional artists as templates for success. In an increasingly publicity-driven, commercial and lucrative art market it is hardly surprising that amateur artists began to have larger ambitions to exhibit and even to sell their work.⁴⁴ Once middle-class amateurs, both male and female, decided to offer their work to mainstream exhibitions, antagonism started to be expressed by artists and critics alike, blaming 'the mass of the amateurs



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*H.M. THE QUEEN, H.R.H. THE PRINCESS OF WALES,
H.R.H. THE PRINCESS LOUISE,
and other members of the Royal Family,*

and besides being very generally used by the principal Artists and Amateurs of the day, is found to be invaluable to Military Officers for Field Sketching, etc.

					£	s.	d.
Size 8 inches by 4 inches, including Water Cup	...	...	...	...	0	10	6
„ 8 „ 5 „ 10 Colours, large Sable Brush, &c.	...	...	...	...	0	16	6
„ 12 „ 7½ „ 10 Half Pans of Colour, Tube of Chinese White, 2 Sables, &c.	...	...	...	...	1	5	0

Figure 3.5: Combination pocket sketch book and palette in catalogue dated circa 1899–1906. Author's collection.

and fifth-rate painters of the country who are too ignorant even to perceive their hopeless incompetence' for their intrusion into an already overcrowded market.⁴⁵ The amateur began to be depicted as competing unfairly with the professional artist: 'a man who does imperfectly to please himself, what another man does to earn a living'.⁴⁶ This resentment is found in many exhibition reviews, singling out amateur works for being too large, too well placed, not for sale and supplanting the better work of a professional. It is noticeable that much of this vitriol was directed against male amateurs, female artists perhaps being assumed to be unworthy of serious notice. The fact that many female amateurs confined their work to the exhibitions run by the Society of Women Artists and were therefore only in competition with other women may also have deflected criticism.

Roberson's accounts reflect this increase in amateur exhibiting with frequent orders for portorage to and from galleries that actively encouraged the amateur artist, such as the Society of Female Artists, founded in 1857, the Dudley Gallery, founded in 1865 and, if the amateur was sufficiently well connected, the Grosvenor Gallery, founded in 1877. While many amateurs benefited from attempts to open up exhibition spaces to a wider constituency, the professionals casting envious eyes at these amateur exhibitors might have been mollified had they seen how frequently Roberson returned to fetch rejected pictures. Edith Emily Wanklyn, in many respects epitomising the popular view of the female amateur in being both a vicar's daughter and a spinster, tenaciously but fruitlessly submitted groups of miniatures to the Royal Academy every year from 1901 to 1907, with the exception of 1905, when she had two miniatures rejected by the Royal Institute for Painters in Water Colours instead.⁴⁷ How these failure rates compared to those of professional artists is unknown, but as the unfortunate Edith Wanklyn never managed to get a single miniature accepted by the Royal Academy, it must be assumed that her 100 per cent rejection rate was unlikely to have been surpassed.

Conclusion: accommodating the amateur market

The rise of art as a pastime had some advantages for professional artists, offering opportunities for established artists to teach amateurs, particularly while women were largely excluded from art education, to write manuals offering advice in lieu of training and to formulate materials for the wide range of artistic techniques the amateur wished to pursue. For the

enterprising artist, the large pool of amateurs could therefore be an opportunity rather than a threat. For the enterprising colourmen they presented a new and potentially lucrative market extending beyond the capital to all parts of the British Isles, the British empire and, in particular, to America, where the internationally astute Winsor & Newton was to dominate the market by the end of the nineteenth century.⁴⁸

The need to supply materials suitable for a wider market is seen in Roberson's surviving catalogues from the last quarter of the century, when materials for amateurs and students begin to appear. By the 1880s Roberson's catalogues listed a number of products of a lower price and quality specifically aimed at students. The catalogues placed a new emphasis on sketching, etching and copying, exchanging their classical plaster casts for sentimental whimsy in the form of figures such as 'Lonely Baby', a best-seller, and lending or hiring drawings for their amateur customers to copy. Despite being an element of artistic training encouraged by Ruskin among others, when copies were shown in public they often attracted derision, predominantly directed against female exhibitors, although copies formed only a small proportion of their output.⁴⁹ While criticised for being imitative and unoriginal, amateurs purchased surprisingly few mechanical aids from Roberson, the incidence of instruments designed to aid composition, such as the Claude glass, camera lucida or projectorama, being no more frequent in amateur accounts than in those of professional artists.

By the turn of the century Roberson had gone further into the student and amateur markets, developing a range of tempera colours, 'produced at the suggestion of some of the leading Art Masters in the Kingdom' and also stocking chicken skin mounted for fan painting, paper for lampshade painting, school geometry sets and a much wider range of miniature painters' materials and accessories than the simple ivories once offered, at a time when miniature painting was almost solely the preserve of the amateur. In the catalogues after 1900 there is a greater emphasis on products used outside the professional studio, whether wearing the 'belt' easel on sketching trips (Figure 3.6), catering for amateur theatricals with materials for scene painting or combining two Edwardian leisure pursuits, cycling and sketching, in the 'bicycle sketching case in strong waterproof canvas for attachment to bicycle'.

Perhaps snobbery, ingrained traditionalism, the inertia of a family firm or simply a lack of commercial foresight led Roberson to avoid exploiting the expanding amateur market of the nineteenth century, only to embrace it as it began to contract in the twentieth. Even then, for Roberson, the democratisation of art ended with the middle classes. By the time demands for more comprehensive and active artistic

THE "BELT" EASEL.



As the name indicates, the "BELT" EASEL is worn on a belt by the Artist. The belt has two brackets, one on each side. The position of these brackets may be changed so as to make it suit the waist, and ought to be placed more to the back than the front. After having put the belt on, open the folded Easel and take the middle leg off, then fix the upper and lower pieces by means of the of the sliding plates, keeping the top of the Easel slanted towards you whilst fixing it

into the brackets, thus taking off the strain. This obviates any difficulty of putting the lower pieces into the brackets. After having done that, loosen the screw a little and bend the upper pieces back to the desired angle. Fix the canvas by first placing two hooks on the top outside the frame-work, and the remaining three below inside of it. Then you are ready for work; and if you have a very heavy canvas, or mean to work for long, adjust the third leg as a support. Always remember to bring the frame-work near your body when you adjust the canvas.

Price 21s.

In order to use the Easel in the usual way, simply adjust the hooks

Pocket Easel, consisting of a spiked Stick 4 ft. long and a brass clamp which will hold canvas or board in any position; it can be detached and carried in the pocket	0 6 0
Ditto ditto, with jointed Stick 5 ft. long	0 7 6

Figure 3.6: The 'belt' easel in catalogue dated circa 1899–1906. Author's collection.

participation began to be voiced later in the century, Roberson was already preoccupied by its protracted terminal decline and it would be left to other colourmen to negotiate the shifting markets driven by a new class of amateur artist in the mutable art world of post-1945 Britain.⁵⁰

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Chapter 4

Collecting for the nation: the National Art Collections Fund and the gallery-visiting public in interwar Britain¹

Heidi Egginton

Among the cast of characters who sashay through the account of interwar connoisseurship in Peter Mandler's *The Fall and Rise of the Stately Home* are thousands of those who belonged to a 'stylish, go-ahead' organisation: members of the National Art Collections Fund (NACF, now Art Fund).² Concentrated in the capital, but not as well-off as the Bright Young People and their fashionable interior decorators, less politicised than the modernist urban planners, yet also less enamoured with the rights of landowners than the aesthetes at *Country Life*, fascinated with the contents of country house collections but open to beauty in all its forms, the membership of the NACF was an important and vocal part of art's growing public before the Second World War. The democratisation of culture, in the form defined by Christopher Hilliard as 'a shared sense of entitlement to participate in cultural activities', encompassed artistic and material as well as literary practices.³ Recent scholarship knitting together social history, material culture and museum studies has started to restore the plurality of voices and opinions heard in Mandler's investigation into the audiences for country houses to the histories of other kinds of heritage collections, bringing attention to the private donors, voluntary associations and learning officers who played a creative role in interpreting as well as preserving the raw materials of history.⁴ By contrast, Britain's regional and national art galleries are often seen as reaching a nadir of underfunded fustiness during the interwar period, but shining new light on the infrastructure of public engagement with art collections

can complicate our understanding of the processes by which 'ordinary' people participated in previously elite forms of self expression, taste-making and cultural production.⁵ This chapter uses the little-studied interwar membership and publicity records of the NACF to examine how during this period connoisseurship was being remade for, and by, the 'democratic coalition' consisting of collectors, museum professionals, artists and art-loving members of the general public its founders had originally attempted to unite in the service of art collections.⁶

Established in 1903, the NACF was one of a number of fundraising and lobbying organisations which emerged during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to address the inadequacy of state and private support for Britain's natural and cultural heritage. Ultra-wealthy American collectors and dealers and well-funded continental European curators circled British private picture collections in ever-greater numbers after the 1870s, as the agricultural depression, changes to the legislation affecting entailed property and the introduction of death duties ensured a steady supply of artworks and other heirlooms from private estates.⁷ Based in London, at the centre of the booming international art market, the NACF's founders were primarily exercised by the rate at which Old Master paintings were leaving the country, coupled with what they saw as the mismanagement of the existing purchasing grants at the national galleries.⁸ Direct inspiration came from the Société des Amis du Louvre and the Kaiser Friedrichs Museumsverein, but the NACF aimed to act as a collective 'friends' association for museums and galleries across Britain.⁹ In its early years its membership had grown at a comparable rate to that of older preservation charities like the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings and the National Trust, traditionalist bodies who relied on periodic public outcry over threats to heritage to answer their campaigns or stimulate additional aid from the Treasury.¹⁰ During the 1920s, however, the NACF made significant strides in terms of its supporter engagement: in addition to special appeals to which non-members could contribute, it increased its annual one-guinea subscriptions sevenfold to over 12,000 between 1918 and 1930, while the National Trust continued to languish at around 2,000 members. This allowed it to act in part as a civic-minded pressure group, in part as a dispersed friendly society and social club for art lovers. In return for their financial and moral support, the NACF provided subscribing members with special privileges, including invitations to collections otherwise inaccessible to the general public. By its twenty-first anniversary it could boast of having raised over £200,000 and of having placed over 400 gifts in Britain's art galleries, libraries and museums.¹¹ Despite early attempts to absorb competition from institutional

groups it also saw sister organisations arrive with overlapping constituencies of supporters.¹² Its identity was sufficiently distinctive, however, that members readily used its initials after their names when writing in to newspapers and collecting journals on the subject of the nation's artistic heritage. The NACF may have been dwarfed in size throughout this period by other national charitable and voluntary associations, but its success at this particular moment deserves further scrutiny; indeed, following a dip in membership after the Great Depression, subscription numbers would not reach interwar levels again until the 1970s.

This chapter places the perspectives and activities of NACF members alongside those of the politicians, aristocratic trustees and the new cadre of curatorial professionals and administrators who are typically seen to have directed the national conversation on support for the arts before the Second World War.¹³ In so doing, it makes an intervention into studies of the art market, collecting and museums which have given the NACF only a walk-on role as a source of charitable funding for the development of collections, rather than as a key player in the changing nature of the relationship between the art world and the general public. Art Fund anniversary publications are veritable portable museums, bringing together object biographies of the most notable acquisitions it helped to distribute throughout the country, while its impact on art gallery holdings is also well-documented in institutional histories.¹⁴ However, the experience of belonging to the NACF in this period has not yet formed the basis of historical enquiry. Only the outlines of the composition and influence of the NACF's wider membership can be glimpsed in histories of arts administration at the turn of the century. In her study of the running of four London art galleries Andrea Geddes Poole noted the quietly radical potential of the NACF's approach before 1914, suggesting that its high-profile Edwardian campaigns heralded a shift in fine-arts philanthropy from individual patrician acts of munificence to groups of middle-class donors 'uniting to act collectively'.¹⁵ The NACF has also been recognised as an important entry point for women into the male-dominated world of art patronage and cultural politics prior to the extension of the franchise – not least for its instigator and co-founder Christiana Herringham, the artist and critic, whose name continued to be linked with the organisation in its interwar press coverage.¹⁶ At its peak in 1930, women were reported to make up a majority of the NACF's subscribing members, though it should be noted that few other women held official positions of authority within the organisation in this period.¹⁷ When individual supporters are brought into focus, it is typically in connection with the spectacular acts which helped to secure individual Old Master paintings like the 'Rokeby' *Venus*

(in 1906)¹⁸ or Holbein's *Duchess of Milan* (in 1909)¹⁹ for the national galleries.

The NACF's interwar membership archive reveals that its subscribers and other supporters were not simply invited to participate anonymously in fundraising campaigns as private donors. They also played an active part in discussions surrounding the accessibility of art in public collections. Janet Minihan's classic study of government funding for the arts noted an upsurge in initiatives aimed at bringing visual art to the 'man-in-the-street' during the 1930s, with results which 'proved critically important . . . for the subsequent growth of public art subsidies'.²⁰ I argue that the NACF should be seen as another important conduit between the art world, the state and the public: an advocate for the art of earlier periods within the wider constellation of interwar organisations who aimed to introduce contemporary art to the people, about which much has been written by scholars of modernism.²¹ Subscribers wrote to the NACF's skeleton administrative staff with ideas for growing the membership or to debate the merits of particular purchases they had seen, and even to object to how artworks were interpreted and displayed. In turn, the NACF harnessed the impulses of a broad constituency of art lovers in its publicity and approach, linking the increasingly accessible habit of buying inexpensive artworks for the home to supporting the enrichment of the nation's museums and galleries. This chapter examines the way in which the NACF consciously responded to and drew part of its strength from popular cultures of art appreciation and collecting, in part thanks to the dynamism of its chairman, Sir Robert Witt, then turns to explore its relationship with its membership and the benefits subscribers received from being part of its 'democratic coalition' of art lovers.

The rise of the small collector

Aiming for broad appeal while speaking to the aesthetically discerning proved a difficult tightrope for the NACF and its members to walk, but the persona of the private collector proved to be a key point of connection between the organisation and the public. By the 1920s, making collections of antiques, curios and inexpensive works of art had become a popular middle-class hobby.²² 'Small collectors' made up an important segment of the market for home furnishings and art and interior design journals, and long before the rise of eBay and the *Antiques Roadshow* there was a recognition among popular retailers and journalists of the cultural importance of the specific practices connected with viewing and purchasing works of art, including those of recent vintage.²³ Commercial art galleries in London

pivoted to cater to an influx of women collectors: young, educated, increasingly financially independent and on the hunt for handcrafted objects and reproductions with which to decorate small flats.²⁴ Collectors of all kinds claimed a special authority as both consumers and exhibition visitors. The two-penny collectors' weekly *Bazaar, Exchange & Mart* could announce in 1928 that the V&A had become 'a training ground for connoisseurs', and in the next sentence: '[n]o wonder then that it is said to attract more people every year than any other museum in the country' – statements which do not follow logically, as the V&A's historian points out, until seen in the context of a growing public appetite for art appreciation which extended beyond the gallery into the bric-à-brac shop, market stall and home.²⁵ The NACF helped to bring these conceptions of small-scale, domestic collecting to the conversation on support for the arts, and in so doing laid important groundwork for later developments in arts funding and access to collections by complicating the picture of a public in need of art instruction.

Amid soaring picture prices, special appeals to save Old Masters from the clutches of American millionaires may have given the NACF its overriding impetus and dominated the public's impression of the organisation's activities, but its administrators and supporters in the art press were keen to stress that its day-to-day mission covered art of all periods and places. Based after 1918 in offices at the Wallace Collection at Hertford House, the archetypal opulent nineteenth-century private collector's museum, the NACF saw part of its role during the interwar period as a nationwide 'clearing house' and intelligence network mediating between collectors large and small – for whom it offered an opportunity to dispose of works of art without incurring additional taxes – and the acquisition priorities of local and regional museums.²⁶ Its publicity often drew attention to successes in placing prestigious works of art with local or regional connections into the relevant repository – for instance, pictures by Constable for Ipswich and Joseph Wright of Derby for Derby, or the last letter of Mary, Queen of Scots as part of the campaign to establish the National Library of Scotland. Olivia Baskerville and Laura Cleaver's study of the 1920 appeal to save a twelfth-century manuscript of the 'Life of St Cuthbert', made in the north-east of England, for the British Museum notes the way in which the NACF attempted (albeit with only partial success) to tap into local networks of its members for small monetary donations towards campaigns spearheaded by metropolitan professionals.²⁷ Less well recognised has been the NACF's role in channelling lower-profile gifts and bequests to museums and galleries informed by 'lists' from local curators, on whose behalf it would also sometimes bid at auction in this period.²⁸

The acquisitions the interwar NACF made on behalf of the nation ranged from masterpieces to the ‘minor arts’ in all periods, including prints and drawings, miniatures, sculpture, ceramics, coins, metalwork, textiles and costume, jewellery, furniture and period rooms, literary and illuminated manuscripts, scientific instruments, archaeological finds and ethnographic collections. Living artists were represented, and in 1932 one anonymous donor gave £200 to the National Portrait Gallery for new commissions. The NACF occasionally acquired the work of younger artists, as in 1934 when it helped to purchase a sculpture of a swift by the twenty-one-year-old studio potter Walter Vivian Cole for Leicester Museum and Art Gallery via the design reformer Harry Peach. Parallel fundraising campaigns by the Contemporary Art Society and regional museum friends’ organisations across Britain and the Commonwealth were also supported in this period.²⁹ While it necessarily had to be selective in the acquisitions it supported, its eclectic, decentralised approach meant that the NACF was seen to act by and for artists and collectors. Speaking in 1937, the politician Malcolm MacDonald confessed, alluding to his own penchant for collecting ceramics: ‘I for one am so grateful that the [NACF] does not forget the importance of good teapots, cream jugs and cups and saucers’.³⁰

‘The ambassador of the public’: Sir Robert Witt

The NACF had a natural champion of the ‘small collector’ in the form of its chairman from 1920 to 1945 and co-founder, Sir Robert Witt. A solicitor who had begun collecting photographs and reproductions of artworks in partnership with his future wife, Mary Helene Marten, while both were undergraduates at Oxford, Witt was among the early generation of arts professionals who represented a thorn in the side of the traditional culture of aristocratic trusteeship.³¹ In later life, Kenneth Clark remembered him as an effective, if ‘forceful’ administrator. On Clark’s first day as Director of the National Gallery in January 1934, his ‘first visitor’ was ‘Sir Robert Witt, who came to tell me that anything I did must be attributed to the [NACF]’ (quickly followed by the Director of the V&A, who came to tell Clark ‘that, whatever I did, I must never have anything to do’ with them).³² Witt was involved in establishing the Courtauld Institute of Art, the first higher education institution dedicated to the training of art historians in Britain, during the early 1930s, but he had long held an interest in ministering to a broader art-loving public. In 1902 he had published his first illustrated primer on approaching fine art, *How to Look at Pictures*, which addressed itself not to ‘the artist, the expert or the professional critic’, but

to those who 'long to feel at home in a collection of pictures, instead of lost in a strange world and out of touch with its inhabitants'.³³ He went on to play a prominent role in organising a series of loan exhibitions of European art at Burlington House in the late 1920s and early 1930s which broke new ground as large-scale, performative 'blockbuster' art shows.³⁴ A vote of thanks for speeches by Witt and by Sir William Llewellyn, the president of the Royal Academy, at the NACF's 1928 annual general meeting declared that, if Llewellyn was the 'ambassador of art', Witt was 'the ambassador of the public'.³⁵ The Witt Library of over 750,000 reproductions and Old Master drawings would be bequeathed to the Courtauld, but until his death Witt and his wife continued to open the collection as a free resource at their London home, 32 Portman Square, a fact often advertised in newspaper coverage of the NACF and exploited by its members.³⁶

Witt's advocacy on behalf of the NACF built a case for improved financial support of the arts based on their importance in everyday life. His route for the NACF to 'become more fully "national"', as he had proposed on the eve of accepting the chairmanship, was to attract support 'not only, as at present, by those specially interested as artists, connoisseurs, collectors, and critics, but by every art lover in the land'.³⁷ This audience, he maintained, was already fully formed, rather than in need of coaxing into action. Witt's stance extended the shift, identified by Giles Waterfield among regional museums in this period, from a liberal ethos of civic improvement towards a 'new egalitarianism' and the support of 'non-vocational enjoyment of art for the public at large'.³⁸ In his 1911 pamphlet *The Nation's Art Treasures*, which helped prompt the setting up of the Curzon Committee of enquiry into the sale of paintings to collectors overseas, Witt had argued it was 'public opinion', spanning the 'universities' to the market for 'the reproductions that fill the shop windows', that was putting pressure on the state to stop neglecting art as 'the illegitimate child of Education'.³⁹

The idea of finding a remedy appeals to-day to the patriotism and sentiment of thousands to whom the idea of part-ownership in the great national collections has lately come with all the combined force of truth and novelty. The realisation by the public that the National Gallery is *their* National Gallery, as they ascend the steps and thrill at the sight of some new masterpiece added to the collection, is a very real and powerful influence at work.⁴⁰

Witt typically quoted from members' letters on this theme in his speeches; indeed, NACF record-keeping practices under his chairmanship mean that letters received from members of the public on specific topics were retained

and filed alongside those from NACF committee members and other art world professionals.⁴¹

In Witt's view, those who felt a sense of personal 'part-ownership' of the contents of public collections needed no particular qualification to appreciate art, but they did require support in the form of well-run museums. In 1920, anticipating the damning report on the health of public museums submitted to the Carnegie Trust in 1928 by Sir Henry Miers, Witt added a chapter to the third edition of *How to Look at Pictures* focusing on the importance of what he called the 'machinery of showing' art in galleries, which included good lighting, combining paintings with works of art and furniture 'of the same school and period', and offering inexpensive catalogues and postcards.⁴² He used his platform at the NACF's annual meetings to address the slow progress made in implementing the recommendations of the Royal Commission on National Museums and Galleries (1927–30), endorsing the need for improvements to additional visitor services in the form of free admission, rest and refreshment areas, circulating exhibitions, extended opening hours and 'liaison officers at each Museum specially appointed to promote closer contact with the public'.⁴³ But it was the encounter with the work of art itself which formed the direct link between the British people and their institutions. 'The connexion between the museums and the public is in reality a most intimate one', Witt suggested in a letter to *The Times* acknowledging the success of the NACF's 1920 appeal to purchase Pieter Bruegel the Elder's *Adoration of the Kings* for the National Gallery, 'for the objects we most admire in them will often represent just those very things with which we try to surround ourselves in our homes and in our lives'.⁴⁴ For Witt, 'a visit to a museum ought to make any visitor go away not merely thinking that he has seen a number of interesting things, but wanting . . . to feel that they are an essential part of his everyday life'.⁴⁵

These themes were developed in Witt's BBC radio talks in 1927 and 1937, which took the form of discussions on the NACF's aims and achievements to solicit new subscribing members rather than direct appeals for financial aid.⁴⁶ In his first talk, Witt expanded on a metaphor he had used in earlier speeches and writings to portray American collectors' insatiable desire for the art in British galleries as on a continuum with the 'craving' for 'all that is rare and beautiful' felt by ordinary people: 'The layman must have [works of art] to satisfy his hunger for beauty, a hunger felt consciously or unconsciously by every man, woman, and child'.⁴⁷ For this reason anyone could become a 'private collector' in order to 'express the artist that lies in each one of us', he would go on to argue at the NACF's annual meeting in 1935: 'I know a typist who collects old master drawings, a policeman who picks up etchings, a clerk who specialises in textiles—be they only

little scraps of old brocades or silks'.⁴⁸ Witt's October 1937 talk, 'Collecting for a Nation', declared that this capacity for recognising beauty among the British public would usher in a new era of selflessness in art appreciation. On the advice of the BBC editor, the talk was framed by Witt's line 'Everyone is—or should be—a collector of something'.⁴⁹ Donating to the NACF was directly compared to collecting stamps or buying souvenirs for the home. The difference was that helping to raise funds to collect works of art for public galleries not only increased one's own enjoyment of art, it increased 'the enjoyment of the whole Nation'.⁵⁰

'Collecting for a Nation' prompted a flurry of correspondence with listeners, most of whom are identified in annotation as 'non-members'. Most wrote in to the NACF with descriptions of works of art or antiques in their own personal collections to ask for advice on where to place them in public museums. The objects offered included an engraving, a set of old Dutch tiles, a carved ivory fan, a 'very large lamp' from China, several portraits, a 'Mahogany bookcase, over 250 years old', and a 'Moorish mirror, which I have twice been told is a museum piece'. A couple from Bournemouth, who had 'listened with great interest' to the talk, wrote to Witt to describe their 'gold enamelled Fob Seal (musical) which formerly belonged to George Frederic Handel'. A widow from Harrow who felt she had been taken advantage of by local dealers in the past admitted that her three pictures 'may not be of interest to the Nation' but asked for Witt to guide her towards a more 'genuine' opinion. Only one correspondent, who described himself as a 'working man' who had been 'unemployed for a considerable time', and who was seeking to sell a painting he had placed on loan in his local art gallery through the NACF, expressed any doubt as to whether he had written to the right place. Indeed, each of the letters which survives in the archive received a personalised response with guidance and suggestions. A radiologist from Chingford who had asked where to offer his 'early Victorian sideboard' was pointed in the direction of the Geffrye Museum, for instance.⁵¹ These listeners may have misinterpreted the NACF's appeal for new members, but they evidently understood Witt's appeal to the small collector.

'All Art-Lovers Should Join'

Outside of its chairman's advocacy, the NACF relied to a significant extent on word of mouth to raise awareness of the organisation and its activities. While it expected its name to be included in wall labels for the works of art it helped place in public collections, only limited funds were made available for formal advertising. This included placing reproductions of

paintings saved in high-profile appeals on the London Underground, and a poster and magazine campaign with the slogan 'All Art-Lovers Should Join'.⁵² The NACF also attracted offers from public relations professionals keen to work with it during the 1930s.⁵³ However, Witt noted that, in comparison to the full-time publicity staff employed by American museum friends associations, the NACF's best 'recruiting sergeants' were its members.⁵⁴ A list containing every member's name was published in the NACF's annual report, with additional lists of those who offered to pay more than the one-guinea minimum subscription fee and those who had made contributions to special appeals. Benefits were conferred on individuals, so subscribing was often a family affair. Circulars asked subscribers to bring NACF events and appeals to the notice of their friends, and forms were provided to collect the details of prospective members, to whom a copy of Witt's pamphlet on the 'Aims and Achievements' of the NACF was posted.⁵⁵ Copies of the NACF annual report were also sent out speculatively to be 'laid on the Library table' of London clubs, but a more vigorous correspondence was maintained throughout this period regarding the design and placement of NACF collection boxes in prominent positions within the London galleries, highlighting the importance of casual monetary donations from museum-goers.⁵⁶

NACF administrators did actively cultivate relationships with editors in the collecting press, illustrating how closely the organisation relied on this growing constituency of art consumers for support. Requests from journalists to 'circularize' the NACF's membership list were always refused, but as a token gesture to *Bazaar, Exchange & Mart*, who had written in 1927 to explore ways of making their weekly for collectors and connoisseurs more well known to NACF subscribers, the Secretary displayed copies of the magazine in the front hall of the Wallace Collection.⁵⁷ Approaches were received from other new periodicals founded during the collecting boom of the late 1920s: *Old Furniture*, who wanted to bring their articles on 'artistic handicrafts' to the notice of the NACF's 'lovers of art', and *The Amateur Artist and Collector*, whose own subscribers, the editor promised, were 'of a class well able to subscribe to' the NACF.⁵⁸ Conversely, the NACF prepared photographs of its latest acquisitions, digests of its annual reports, and advertisements for periodicals including the *Burlington Magazine*, *The Artist*, *The Antique Collector* and the *Bazaar*, often noting the increase in membership as a result.⁵⁹

Reaching out beyond a metropolitan audience of art lovers became a significant concern during the late 1920s, the period in which the NACF was experiencing the biggest jump in annual subscriptions. The organisation maintained a network of 'Local Representatives', who were tasked with distributing campaign literature and coordinating talks and events.

Coverage was patchy and dependent on the interests of volunteers: during the interwar period, there were at most two representatives covering the whole of Scotland, both based in Edinburgh, and none in Wales. A set of notes in the NACF archive records an attempt to analyse the geographic spread of the membership in 1929, when only 1,244 of over 12,000 subscribers had addresses outside of London. The largest concentrations were those in the Home Counties and East Anglia, followed by Yorkshire and Lancashire.⁶⁰ These figures were circulated in an effort to address the regional disparities, and in late 1929 the NACF received a variety of letters from non-metropolitan members with suggestions for driving up subscriptions. These included the names and addresses of friends or notable collectors in their county, as well as the published membership lists of other societies linked to art or collecting, such as the Cambridge Drawing Society, the Winchester Art Club and the Blackburn Antiquarian Society.⁶¹ During the 1930s, the NACF also fielded requests from local curators hoping to borrow its acquisitions for their galleries: one, in search of a Jacob Epstein or other examples of modern sculpture for Hereford, maintained '[t]here are hundreds of people in this city . . . who have never seen a fine work of art except the exterior of the cathedral'.⁶²

One of the main drivers for art lovers to join the NACF during the interwar period was acknowledged to be the assortment of member privileges, or 'treats', offered to those who paid the one-guinea annual subscription fee. Membership cards entitled the holder to free entry on paying days to London's major art galleries and the Ashmolean, as well as admission to the libraries and print study rooms at the British Museum and V&A. A regular events programme invited subscribers to exhibition openings, after-hours soirées at London museums, lectures on art history and visits to private collections never usually accessible to the public. It was estimated that visits to exhibitions at the Royal Academy between 1927 and 1930 each attracted between 2,000 and 3,500 members over two nights, while owners of large country houses outside of London were asked to expect up to 1,000 guests a day.⁶³ Visits included opportunities to see artworks and interiors in situ before pieces were sold or sites demolished, as at Norfolk House, Westminster, in January 1938, where objects from the collection of the Dukes of Norfolk were being prepared for auction at Christie's. This strand of the NACF's activities served as an important form of publicity in its own right, often attracting press interest and boosting subscription figures: the chance to see the 1930 Exhibition of Italian Art the day before the official private view was reported to have generated nearly 1,000 new members in the previous month.⁶⁴ The NACF actively responded to members' suggestions for visits, especially those they could combine with recruitment drives outside of London.⁶⁵

Given free rein by generous owners of private collections, the NACF was able to make interventions on behalf of its members. Witt personally ensured that visits to private collections, for which members were provided with discounted rail or coach tickets, were led by owners or other knowledgeable guides, and in several cases paid additional visits to the collections to rewrite their catalogues in summary format organised by room, rather than by style or period, so members could 'go round the house with a copy' and 'know what they are looking at'.⁶⁶ Visits generated a vigorous correspondence with members, whether comments on how 'their' purchases were being displayed and the behaviours of other exhibition visitors, or with gratitude for the provision of supplementary lectures and guidebooks. In March 1935 members were invited to a soirée to celebrate the installation of electric lighting at the National Gallery: an improvement Witt had long been urging the Office of Works to make as a 'public service'. 'I hope', he wrote to Kenneth Clark after the event, 'some of the *voces populi* reached you as to the colour of the walls and the arrangement of the pictures'.⁶⁷

Conclusion

This chapter has taken a perspective on the history of collecting 'from below' by examining one of the organisations which did most to communicate the value of the pursuit to new audiences in Britain during the interwar period. If it did not directly enfranchise its supporters, the NACF nonetheless acted as a key interface between the art world and members of the general public. Indeed, key to its glittering success during the interwar period was the growing popular culture of art appreciation and consumption which both sustained and helped shape the direction of its campaigns. That the NACF's dramatic expansion after the First World War harnessed a connection between the acquisition of works of art, broadly defined, for members' own homes and contributions to the welfare of Britain's public institutions is suggestive of a more complex relationship with art patronage among non-elite art lovers and museum-goers than has previously been recognised. As *Country Life* put it in 1934, 'through such organisations as the [NACF], it is open to everybody to have a share in a collection of works of art far greater than any monarch's cabinet'.⁶⁸ Uncovering the influence of small collectors on the work of the NACF, which was both drawing on languages of collective ownership and mediating the entry of non-elite visitors into spaces for the reproduction of cultural hierarchies and canon formation, can challenge conventional narratives of progress in the widening of public access to Britain's art collections during

the mid-twentieth century. The evident importance of appealing to art-loving consumers across different aspects of the NACF's activities – from its 'treats' and publicity to the actual business of fundraising – demonstrates how, before the Second World War, the popular private investment in collecting could be harnessed for the purposes of improving public access to art and cementing its status as a social good.

Notes

1. The research for this chapter was made possible by a Research Support Grant from the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, 2017–18. I am grateful to Art Fund for permission to access and quote from its archive.
2. P. Mandler, *The Fall and Rise of the Stately Home* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997), pp. 238–9, 265–308.
3. C. Hilliard, *To Exercise Our Talents: The Democratisation of Writing in Britain* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2006), pp. 5–8.
4. K. Hill, *Women and Museums, 1850–1914: Modernity and the Gendering of Knowledge* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016); L. Carter, *Histories of Everyday Life: The Making of Popular Social History in Britain, 1918–1979* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), pp. 128–61. For an earlier period, see also T. Stammers, 'Elite and Popular Connoisseurship at the Louvre, c.1848–1870', in C. M. Anderson and P. Stewart (eds.), *Connoisseurship* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023), pp. 95–131.
5. B. Taylor, *Art for the Nation: Exhibitions and the London Public, 1747–2001* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1999), pp. 132, 155–66; G. Waterfield, *The People's Galleries: Art Museums and Exhibitions in Britain, 1800–1914* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2015), pp. 2–4, 319–21; G. Crossick, 'Museums, Audiences and Collections: Thinking About Historical Context', *Cultural Trends*, 27 (2018), pp. 232–8.
6. M. Lago, *Christiana Herringham and the Edwardian Art Scene* (London: Lund Humphries, 1996), pp. 80–81.
7. H. Rees, 'Art Exports and the Construction of National Heritage in Late Victorian and Edwardian Britain', in C. D. Goodwin and N. De Marchi (eds.), *Economic Engagements with Art* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), pp. 187–208; P. Mandler, 'Art, Death and Taxes: The Taxation of Works of Art in Britain, 1796–1914', *Historical Research*, 74 (2001), pp. 271–97; J. Stourton, *Heritage: A History of How We Conserve Our Past* (London: Bloomsbury, 2023), pp. 95–113.
8. P. Fletcher and A. Helmreich (eds.), *The Rise of the Modern Art Market in London, 1850–1939* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011); B. Pezzini, '(Inter)national Art: The London Old Masters Market and Modern British Painting (1900–14)', in J. D. Baetens and D. Lyna (eds.), *Art Crossing Borders: The Internationalisation of the Art Market in the Age of Nation States, 1750–1914* (Leiden: Brill, 2019), pp. 127–63.
9. On the establishment of the NACF, see M. Lago, *Christiana Herringham*, pp. 57–121; J. Gardiner, 'Rebels and Connoisseurs', in M. Bailey and R. Verdi (eds.), *Saved! 100 Years of the National Art Collections Fund* (London: Scala, 2003), pp. 16–25; A. Geddes Poole, *Stewards of the Nation's Art: Contested Cultural Authority 1890–1939* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), pp. 101–29. Friends' organisations were not unheard of in Britain: Birmingham had its own 'Public Picture Gallery Fund' with a purchase committee enjoying an endowment of £17,000 by 1881; see Waterfield, *The People's Galleries*, p. 206.

10. Mandler, *Fall and Rise*, p. 269.
11. D. S. MacColl, 'Twenty-One Years of the National Art Collections Fund', *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs*, 44.253 (1924), p. 179.
12. The Scottish Modern Arts Association (established 1908) and Contemporary Art Society (established 1910) organised along similar lines to the NACF to champion the work of living artists. In 1931 the Friends of the National Libraries (now Friends of the Nations' Libraries) took on the work of saving rare books and manuscripts for public collections. Regional funds were also established, such as the Leeds Art Collections Fund (later Leeds Art Fund) in 1912.
13. A. R. Upchurch, *The Origins of the Arts Council Movement: Philanthropy and Policy* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), pp. 77–102.
14. J. Stancliffe (ed.), *Saved for Scotland: Works of Art Acquired with the Help of the National Art Collections Fund* (Edinburgh: National Gallery of Scotland, 1991); A. Wilson, *National Art Collecting: A Celebration of the National Art Collections Fund* (London: Laurence King, 1993); and M. Bailey and R. Verdi (eds.), *Saved! 100 Years of the National Art Collections Fund* (London: Scala, 2003). For instance, the NACF is a protagonist in J. Conlin, *The Nation's Mantelpiece: A History of the National Gallery* (London: Pallas Athene, 2006).
15. Geddes Poole, *Stewards of the Nation's Art*, p. 127.
16. J. Bailkin, *The Culture of Property: The Crisis of Liberalism in Modern Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), p. 152; M. Clarke, "'The Greatest Living Critic': Christiana Herringham and the Practice of Connoisseurship', *Visual Resources*, 33 (2017), pp. 94–117; S. Avery-Quash and C. Riding, 'Two Hundred Years of Women Benefactors at the National Gallery: An Exercise in Mapping Uncharted Territory', *Journal of Art Historiography*, 23 (2020), p. 45; T. Stammers, 'Women Collectors and Cultural Philanthropy', *19: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century*, 31 (2021).
17. 'Art Treasures: Romantic Growth of Purchase Fund', *Scotsman*, 11 January 1930, p. 14. From the outset individual women had been able to join the NACF as full, voting members on the same terms as men. Women were heavily outnumbered on its Council and as Local Representatives, however, and no women served on the NACF Executive Committee during the interwar period.
18. M. Lago, *Christiana Herringham*, pp. 123–43; B. Pezzini, 'Days with Velázquez: When Charles Lewis Hind Bought the "Rokeby Venus" for Lockett Agnew', *The Burlington Magazine*, 158.1358 (2016), pp. 358–67.
19. Bailkin, *Culture of Property*, pp. 118–58; J. Howard, 'The One That Didn't Get Away: New Light on the Sale of Holbein's Duchess of Milan', *Journal of the History of Collections*, 34 (2022), pp. 141–56.
20. J. Minihan, *The Nationalization of Culture: The Development of State Subsidies to the Arts in Great Britain* (New York: New York University Press, 1977), pp. 183–4.
21. D. Moore, *Insane Acquaintances: Visual Modernism and Public Taste in Britain, 1910–1951* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), pp. 60–82; E. West, "'Within the Reach of All': Bringing Art to the People in Interwar Britain', *Modernist Cultures*, 15 (2020), pp. 225–52; M. Herrero and T. R. Buckley, 'Collaborating Profitably? The Fundraising Practices of the Contemporary Art Society', *Business History*, 65 (2023), pp. 1–23.
22. D. Cohen, *Household Gods: The British and Their Possessions* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006), pp. 145–69.
23. H. Egginton, 'Popular Antique Collecting and the Second-Hand Trade in Britain, c.1868–1939', unpublished PhD thesis, University of Cambridge (2017).

24. A. Stephenson, 'Strategies of Display and Modes of Consumption in London Art Galleries in the Interwar Years', in P. Fletcher and A. Helmreich (eds.), *The Rise of the Modern Art Market in London, 1850–1939* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), pp. 98–125.
25. Quoted in A. Burton, *Vision & Accident: The Story of the Victoria & Albert Museum* (London: V&A Publications, 1999), p. 183. H. Egginton, 'In Quest of the Antique: The Bazaar, Exchange and Mart and the Democratization of Collecting, 1926–42', *Twentieth Century British History*, 28 (2017), pp. 159–85.
26. R. C. Witt, 'The National Art-Collections Fund', *The Studio*, 131 (1946), p. 44.
27. Now BL Yates Thompson MS 26. O. Baskerville and L. Cleaver, 'The Purchase of the *Life of St Cuthbert* for the Nation: Art, History and Politics, c.1903–1920', in V. Lucherini and C. Voyer (eds.), *Le Livre Enluminé Médiéval Instrument Politique* (Rome: Viella, 2021), pp. 159–77.
28. NACF, *Twenty-Fifth Annual Report* (London, 1928), pp. 13–14.
29. National Art Collections Fund Archive, Tate Archive, London, TGA [hereafter NACFA] 9328.2.2.1, 'Annual Lists of Acquisitions' file, nos. 631–1190, 1928–1939.
30. NACF, *Thirty-Fifth Annual Report* (London, 1938), p. 14.
31. Geddes Poole, *Stewards of the Nation's Art*, pp. 102–4.
32. K. Clark, *Another Part of the Wood: A Self Portrait* (London: Harper Collins, 1974), p. 225.
33. R. C. Witt, *How to Look at Pictures* (London: George Bell, 1902), pp. ii, xiv. See also R. C. Witt, *One Hundred Masterpieces of Painting* (London: Methuen, 1910).
34. See, for example, I. Scaglia, '"Beauty Has Ever a Healing Touch": Visible Internationalism at the 1927 Exhibition of Flemish and Belgian Art in London', *Contemporary European History*, 33 (2024), pp. 323–37.
35. NACF, *Twenty-Sixth Annual Report* (London, 1929), p. 17.
36. A. Martin and D. Farr, 'Witt, Sir Robert Clermont (1872–1952), Art Collector', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); NACFA, 9328.9.1.1, correspondence regarding the Witt Library, 1924–38.
37. R. C. Witt, 'To the Editor of the Times: The Exodus of Art Treasures', *The Times*, 5 November 1919, p. 8.
38. Waterfield, *The People's Galleries*, pp. 300–301.
39. R. C. Witt, *The Nation's Art Treasures* (London: William Heinemann, 1911), pp. 9–10; Pezzini, '(Inter)national Art', p. 134.
40. Witt, *Nation's Art Treasures*, pp. 28–9.
41. See, for example, the annotation by a secretary: 'Sir Robert—You might like this for your speech' next to a statement from a woman member from Bounds Green on the 'happiness and delight' her membership privileges had given her, in NACFA 9328.3.3.31, Special Events correspondence, letter dated 2 June 1931.
42. R. C. Witt, *How to Look at Pictures*, 3rd edn (London: George Bell, 1920), pp. 161–70. See also 'Making Museums as Jolly as Dances: Expert's Hints on How to Attract the Public', *Daily Chronicle*, 8 July 1926, p. 5. On the Miers report, see Waterfield, *The People's Galleries*, p. 320.
43. NACF, *Thirty-Fourth Annual Report* (London, 1937), p. 13.
44. R. C. Witt, 'To the Editor of The Times: Art and the Nation', *The Times*, 22 February 1921, p. 11.
45. NACF, *Twenty-First Annual Report* (London, 1924), p. 10.

46. NACFA, 9328.5.1.1, letter from Sir Alec Martin to J. Ramsay MacDonald, 9 July 1937.
47. NACFA, 9328.5.1.2, 'The Nation's Art Treasures', script for BBC broadcast, 2LO, London, 12 May 1927.
48. NACF, *Thirty-Third Annual Report* (London, 1936), p. 11–12.
49. NACFA, 9328.5.1.1, G.R. Barnes, BBC, to Sir Robert Witt, 7 October 1937.
50. NACFA, 9328.5.1.1, 'Collecting for a Nation', copy annotated by G.R. Barnes.
51. NACFA, 9328.5.1.1, letters from listeners, 3–11 November 1937.
52. Bailey and Verdi, eds., *Saved!*, p. 63. See, for example, London Transport Museum Collection 83/4/1132, www.ltmuseum.co.uk/collections/collections-online/posters/item/1983-4-1132 (accessed 25 April 2024).
53. NACFA, 9328.3.1.11, 'Ideas for Publicity' file.
54. NACF, *Thirtieth Annual Report* (London, 1933), p. 10.
55. NACFA, 9328.3.1.6, 'Names and Addresses of Suggested Members' form, n.d. [c.1920s–30s].
56. NACFA, 9328.3.1.6, 'Circular: Sent to Various London Clubs', 24 October 1933; 9328.9.5.28, correspondence regarding collection boxes in museums, 1926–1939.
57. NACFA, 9328.5.1.16, letter from NACF Secretary to Harold Pontefract, *Bazaar*, 14 November 1927.
58. NACFA, 9328.5.1.6, letter from E. G. Halton, *Old Furniture*, 4 May 1928; letter from W. D. Bowman, *Amateur Artist and Collector*, 18 October 1927.
59. NACFA, 9328.5.1.6, 'Correspondence with Periodicals' file. For instance, the NACF confirmed that 'we have, several times, secured new members as a result' of placing advertisements in the *Bazaar*; letter from NACF Secretary to the Editor, *Bazaar*, 15 May 1935.
60. NACFA, 9328.3.1.1, lists of members by county, undated [c.1929].
61. NACFA, 9328.3.1.1, letters from members on increasing county subscriptions, 1929.
62. NACFA, 9328.2.8.1, letter from F. C. Morgan, Hereford Museum, 29 February 1936.
63. NACFA, 9328.3.3.69, letter from NACF Secretary to Kenneth Clark, National Gallery, 6 November 1934; 9328.3.3.31, pro forma request letter to collection owners, undated [c.1931].
64. 'A London Letter: At Burlington House', *Yorkshire Post*, 3 January 1930, p. 6.
65. NACFA, 9328.3.3.106, 'Suggested visits' file, 1927–38.
66. See, for example, NACFA, 9328.3.3.33, letter from Witt to Robert Benson, Dorchester House, 30 June 1924; 9328.3.3.67, letter from NACF Secretary to secretary, Bath House, Piccadilly, 6 June 1934.
67. NACFA, 9328.3.3.69, letter from Witt to Kenneth Clark, National Gallery, 9 March 1935.
68. 'Editorial: Pomp and Circumstances', *Country Life*, 26 May 1934, p. 528.

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Interlude D

Professionalisation, publishing and policy: Peter Mandler and the Royal Historical Society

Margot Finn and Richard Fisher

The Royal Historical Society (RHS) was founded in 1868. During its long history, the presidency of Peter Mandler (2012–16) has undoubtedly been one of the most consequential. Peter's formal involvement with the Society began several years earlier, serving as Honorary Secretary from 1998 to 2002 and helping to drive through key reforms as the RHS began its long journey from a gentlemanly club of scholars to a properly professional and inclusive learned society, with a strong interest in the career experiences, and prospects, of UK academic historians. This Interlude argues that these so-called 'Mandler reforms' enhanced greatly the Society's ability to function effectively in a challenging funding environment in which it also needed to respond to an ever-increasing range of changes in the agendas of government and associated funding bodies.

The proactive potential of the 'modernising' learned society was conspicuous at multiple levels during Peter's tenure as RHS president, but is perhaps best captured by the 2015 publication of the Society's first equalities report, *Gender Equality and Historians in UK Higher Education: A Report by the Royal Historical Society*.¹ With a foreword by Dame Jinty Nelson (the first woman RHS president, serving from 2001 to 2005), the report adopted a characteristically Mandlerian approach, combining social science and humanities methods of analysis.

It began with the fact that while History enjoyed a broadly equal gender balance at school and university level, academic staffing in the UK

discipline was 60 per cent male and the professoriate only 20.8 per cent female. Drawing on a wide secondary literature and a survey that attracted 707 responses testifying to the state of play on the ground, the report was robust in its evidence base, forceful in its messaging and pragmatic in its recommendations and advice. Its core message that 'Gender Equality is not just a problem for women' (page 6) was carried forward into the field by Peter Mandler and his RHS colleagues at public events and workshops sponsored by the Society. Published Open Access (OA), the report offered colleagues a hard-hitting analysis calculated to inform and enhance equalities initiatives in a wide range of institutional settings.

As models and formats of scholarly communication had been seemingly so entrenched among historians for so long, perhaps more surprising was the emerging importance to the modernisation of the RHS's working practices of publishing, and more specifically the advent of OA publishing models. Two distinct impulses, the democratic and the commercial, have always co-existed as drivers for OA scholarly communication, certainly as it has developed within the UK. Indeed *to whom* access should be open (whether readers, authors or organisations) has been and remains a very significant practical policy challenge.

UK OA had begun around the turn of the twenty-first century as a series of samizdat initiatives in (primarily) the biomedical sciences, growing significantly in traction over the next decade. When David Willetts, Minister of State for Universities and Science in the Coalition Government (2010–14), decided that widespread OA could provide the necessary 'steam' to unleash British innovation, the die, at least in the UK, was cast: indeed the development of OA in the UK would be, to a degree then unprecedented in the global North, an act of state.

Willetts commissioned Dame Janet Finch to chair an enquiry into OA opportunities within the UK. Her extensive report appeared in 2012. Its original governmental motivation is often now overlooked, but the preamble to the Finch Report made the commercial imperative behind the UK OA policy agenda crystal-clear: 'Removing paywalls that surround taxpayer funded research will have real economic and social benefits. It will allow academics and businesses to develop and commercialise their research more easily and herald a new era of academic discovery.'²

The application of this mode of thinking about OA to all modes of British scholarly enquiry has proved, in practice, highly problematic. Historians, led initially in institutional terms by Peter Mandler as RHS president, have been vital in articulating an alternative and sometimes dissenting voice from outside the STEM disciplines, one which has caused both policy-makers and their institutional adherents occasional irritation.

This ‘dissent’ rarely stems from universalist objections to OA principles, but rather from a very strong belief that all policy pronouncements should be properly evidence-based. A firm evidential grounding has not, sadly, characterised all UK OA policy pronouncements, whether emanating from research funders and/or assessors or from some of their more vocal supporters within the burgeoning ‘scholarly communications’ industry. And for historians the generally acknowledged lack of international monographic data, whether of outputs or revenues or units sold, remains a major obstacle to proper policy formulation within the monographic domain.

This evidential lacuna was one of the biggest challenges facing those (of whom Peter Mandler was one, as was Richard Fisher) helping to advise the historian Geoffrey Crossick when he was commissioned by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) to write what remains far and away the most subtle and substantial monographic policy intervention of recent years, *Monographs and Open Access* (2015).³ The intellectual and technological issues raised in this report (not least around the experience of long-form reading on screen) remain highly pertinent and (sadly) largely unresolved, as reflected in Research England’s eleventh-hour withdrawal of its proposal to make REF2029 the first Research Excellence Framework exercise to mandate OA for some long-form works.

Crossick called for ambitious experiment, a call which did not fall on deaf ears. The RHS had always had a modest but enduring publication programme of its own, centred around its own *Transactions* and the extensive sequence of primary textual editions published under the *Camden* rubric (a series dating back to 1838). In 1975 the then RHS president Sir Geoffrey Elton agreed with his Cambridge colleague Derek Brewer to establish a new historical monograph series under the editorial control of the RHS at the nascent independent publisher Boydell and Brewer.

This series of Studies in History (SiH) published its first title in 1977, and ultimately this first tranche of RHS historical monographs ran to seventy-five volumes. In 1995 the series was relaunched, with additional editorial and financial inputs from both the Economic History Society and the Past and Present Society. This ‘New Series’ of monographs eventually encompassed well over 100 published volumes, with the final title appearing in 2020.⁴

However, SiH was no more immune to the general sales and pricing challenges confronting the publication of historical monographs than any other UK-based series, and in the context of the burgeoning disciplinary awareness of OA, it seemed to Peter Mandler and to several other members of the RHS’s governing Council that there was an opportunity for the Society to do something pioneering and important, transitioning

the SiH series into something rather different. Thus New Historical Perspectives was born, a series aimed specifically at early-career researchers and designed to give them proper editorial mentoring throughout the entire publishing process. This series, undertaken in conjunction with the Institute of Historical Research and University of London Press, would be published OA from the outset, supported by funding from the Society's own resources, and would include both single-author studies and some collaborative works. Its first title, *The Family Firm* by Edward Owens, was published in 2019.⁵

Inevitably this transition, and the surrounding change in publication arrangements, was not achieved without quite significant resistance from within the Society. In retrospect, however, the launch of New Historical Perspectives has been fully vindicated, both on its own terms as (still) one of the most important new OA monographic ventures to have launched in the UK in the past decade and as a totemic example of the RHS practising what it preaches, and doing something concrete which has helped to give the (many) RHS policy statements on OA that have followed markedly greater validity, and force. Indeed, New Historical Perspectives has helped cement history still further as the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences discipline which policy-makers tend to think of first when considering the implications of OA beyond STEM, a prominence to which Peter Mandler has contributed greatly.

The fact that at the time of writing the future of OA remains so unclear within the general framework of monographic publication in the UK, despite supportive policy pronouncements of many kinds, is partly a reflection of the very straitened circumstances in which so much British humanities research is now conducted. But it also reflects a broader approach to Open Access policy formulation which remains brutally state-specific, failing to understand the international context in which the outputs of (say) British historians have been consumed for the past half-century and more. Here too, however, the Mandler impress can be seen within the landscape of humanities organisations committed to supporting research and teaching at university level in these crucial disciplines. For, it was during his presidency of the RHS – and often in the UCL offices of that organisation – that the interdisciplinary members of the Arts & Humanities Alliance began to develop from the Arts and Humanities User Group A established in 2008. Unsurprisingly, its second chair, serving from 2012 to 2016, was none other than Professor Peter Mandler.⁶ There is more to be learned about this Alliance in the next interlude.

Notes

1. Royal Historical Society, *Gender Equality and Historians in UK Higher Education*, January 2015.
2. Department of Business, Innovation and Skills, 'Government to Open Up Publicly Funded Research', Press Release in response to the Finch Report on Open Access, 16 July 2012.
3. G. Crossick, *Monographs and Open Access: A Report to HEFCE*, January 2015.
4. Royal Historical Society, *Studies in History 1975–2020*.
5. Royal Historical Society, *New Historical Perspectives*.
6. Arts and Humanities Alliance, *Home page*.

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Part III

**‘EXPERTS’ AND THEIR PUBLICS IN
TWENTIETH-CENTURY BRITAIN**

Interlude E

Accountability and double counting in research funding for UK higher education: the case of the Global Challenges Research Fund

Ambreena Manji

The Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF) was a £1.5bn fund announced by the UK Government in November 2015 to support research that addressed the challenges faced by developing countries. Available over five years, the fund constituted a significant investment of Official Development Assistance (ODA) money in research. Aid-funded research on this scale was entirely new for the United Kingdom. We recognised that this was likely to have an important impact on research: we were encouraged to explore this possibility by our colleagues in the Arts and Humanities Alliance (AHA), which Peter Mandler was chairing around this time (October 2016) and which I attended on behalf of the African Studies Association. The AHA is an association of learned societies working to promote the interests of the arts and humanities, with a particular focus on higher education and research policies. Although the availability of GCRF funding had generated considerable interest among university researchers, we could not find any work that reflected critically on this substantial new programme for aid-funded research. We resolved to write on this topic, drawing on our respective interests in the legal framework for UK aid and in higher education and research policy, areas of our expertise which had converged with the advent of ODA-funded research.¹

Although it was presented as a joint Treasury–Department for International Development document, the UK’s new Aid Strategy

announced in 2015 was widely known to have been driven by the Treasury. The then Chancellor of the Exchequer, George Osborne, had taken an active interest in departments beyond the Treasury, and he had played a leading role in the development of the Aid Strategy. In the 2015 Spending Review and Settlement, it was announced that the new GCRF would be disbursed to the UK research councils through their sponsoring ministry, then the Department for Business Innovation and Skills (BIS). In March 2016, BIS published its Allocation of Science and Research Funding 2016–17 to 2019–20, in which it described the GCRF as a new funding stream that would provide an additional £1.5bn to ensure that UK research would take a leading role in addressing the problems faced by developing countries. The fund would use the UK's research base to pioneer new ways of tackling global challenges.

This signalled a significant departure for UK aid. For the first time since its creation in 1997, the Department for International Development (DfID) would not be the sole government department responsible for disbursing aid. Neither would it be the only government department commissioning and supporting research on development issues. Instead, aid funds would be spread throughout Whitehall, including to the then Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Ministry of Defence and BIS. The GCRF was thus part of a new crop of cross-government aid instruments. There had already been some attempts to foster non-DfID research capacity and to make ODA money available to Research Councils. An important precursor to the GCRF was the Newton Fund, launched in 2014 and also funded through ODA.

These innovations added considerable complexity to the workings of UK aid. Departments not traditionally associated with disbursing aid suddenly found themselves in charge of substantial ODA funds. We became interested in the implications for higher education policy and for accountability of this new, more expansive approach to aid disbursement. Our work showed that its roots lay in the government's commitments to ring-fence both aid spending and science and research funding while also making overall spending reductions. Transferring some ODA funds for use by other departments was a useful device for plugging a substantial funding gap. Applying portions of two ring-fenced funds to a single purpose would enable the government to reduce overall spend without explicitly breaking promises.

This was made possible by the scale and significance of the ODA commitment. In 2015, after a long campaign by advocates of aid, the UK passed the International Development (Official Development Target) Act. This legislation compelled the UK to spend 0.7 per cent of gross national

income (GNI) on ODA each year. The UK was the first OECD country to enshrine an obligation to reach an aid target in law.

There has long been considerable flexibility and room for manoeuvre in relation to defining what counts as aid spending. For example, French aid has included expenses for students from developing countries coming to study in French higher education. Aid spending can also be inflated by including other amounts in its calculation. The contents of the ‘aid envelope’ can be altered over time, as donors choose what is to be counted as aid. We had a hunch that in the face of spending targets and with weak mechanisms for scrutiny, it would be possible to stretch the definition of ODA or to take advantage of ambiguities in order to meet the 0.7 per cent target.

The creation of the GCRF raised interesting questions about counting UK aid. BIS described GCRF as protected science spend that was also part of the government’s pledge to allocate 0.7 per cent GNI to ODA. Thus, the GCRF made up the science budget and was also part of the government’s efforts to meet its 0.7 per cent target. Was ODA money being used to plug a hole in the UK’s science and research budget? We found that ODA funds were indeed being double counted, both as part of the UK’s commitment to spend 0.7 per cent GNI on aid and also as its funding of science and research. A lack of transparency in the precise science allocation meant we could not be sure of the exact extent of this double counting, but we estimated that half or more of the ODA funds allocated to research were being double counted. Although it is considered bad practice for aid funds to be counted against more than one commitment, it was clear that UK aid funds were now being reported against two separate promises: an aid target and a research allocation.

In the 2016 BIS allocation, GCRF was counted as part of the ring-fenced budget of funding councils. Over half the GCRF was to be found in this pot. It was clear that ODA funds in the form of GCRF had therefore substituted for core funding. Only ‘unallocated’ GCRF, to be dedicated to interdisciplinary projects following the recommendations of the Nurse Review, was ‘new’ money that was subject to competitive bidding beginning in 2017. This approach was designed to obscure the double counting of core funding.

We also pointed out that there were important questions about the uses to which ODA was being put by Higher Education Institutions in relation to overheads. First, consistent with the research councils’ policy of granting eighty per cent of ‘full economic costing’ for sponsored research, something like half of the research-council spend on research grants went to cover overhead costs rather than directly to the sponsored research.

While this was a reasonable policy to fund the actual cost of research, it did mean, in the case of research counting towards the ODA target, a large proportion of ODA spend was actually supporting university infrastructure rather than directly contributing to the development goals. It was already the case that a larger percentage of research costs was permissible to universities to cover 'delivery' than had been the custom in DfID-sponsored research, something like 4 per cent vs. 1.5 per cent. GCRF also made an additional allocation to the funding councils (Higher Education Funding Council for England and its partners) of £130m – this was in fact the largest single item in the GCRF budget – which was then distributed to universities as infrastructure funding (or 'QR'), apportioned on the basis of assessment under the Research Excellence Framework (REF). As far as we could see, there was no direct accountability from the universities receiving this £130m to ensure that it was actually supporting development goals. It may be that universities spent their additional allocation to make up for the twenty per cent of full economic costing not covered by research-council grants. But there was no connection between the sums universities received in research-council grants (allocated by competition) and the sums they received as QR (allocated by the REF). So there was no obvious way to connect the expenditure of this £130m from GCRF to ODA research, although it was still being counted towards the target.

The questions we raised suggested there was a need for disbursement of the science and research budget in the form of the GCRF to be subject to closer scrutiny. Among OECD donors, the UK was considered a leader in the ODA field, especially since it passed the new target law. And the government has shown itself able to influence the rules of the OECD's Development Assistance Committee (DAC). It had lobbied successfully for a decision by DAC to include some military and defence spending as ODA. Given the cosy relationship the UK enjoyed with the DAC committee, we thought it unlikely that meaningful scrutiny of its GCRF would come from the OECD.

The GCRF was created at a time of considerable regulatory and political uncertainty, as the UK's aid landscape was changing and in the face of political turmoil following the decision to exit the European Union. We believed that the implications of a significant chunk of the UK's research activity being funded by its foreign aid budget did not receive the attention it merited, and that a failure to confront this difficult question risked aid-funded research activity being ineffective and wasteful, or worse.

Notes

1. See P. Mandler, 'Presidential Letter', *Royal Historical Society Newsletter*, May 2016. <https://files.royalhistsoc.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/17210109/Royal-Historical-Society-Newsletter-May-2016.pdf> (accessed 18 August 2024); and A. Manji, 'The International Development (Official Development Assistance Target) Act 2015: Legislative Spending Targets, Poverty Alleviation and Aid Scrutiny', *Modern Law Review*, 79.4 (2016), pp. 655–77.

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Chapter 5

Reluctant pioneers: British anthropologists among the natives of modern Japan, circa 1929–30

Chika Tonooka

Ruth Benedict's *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* (1946) has been hailed as 'one of the most effective ambassadors for cultural relativism published in the twentieth century'.¹ As a best-selling anthropological study of Japanese culture published at the end of the Second World War, the book represents a key example of a pioneering mid-century American effort to apply anthropological insights to the analysis of modern and complex – as opposed to 'primitive' – societies. Among its key contributions was the distinction it made between 'guilt' (US) and 'shame' (Japan) cultures, and the fact that it did so while eschewing universalist judgements that preferred guilt to shame. More broadly, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* amounted to an attempt to combine psychological and cultural-anthropological perspectives to study a national character – what Benedict and her intellectual allies referred to as 'culture cracking'.²

This chapter explores a hitherto overlooked British prehistory of interpreting modern Japanese culture from an anthropological perspective. I focus on two British anthropologists, Charles and Brenda Seligman, to explore their six-month study tour of the Far East in 1929–30. Their unpublished travel journals, lecture notes and published writings (some preceding the trip) on Japan might be collectively viewed as a pioneering British anthropological attempt to study a modern, complex non-Western society – an attempt that indeed preceded the much better-known efforts of their US counterparts. In fact, the Seligmans anticipated the themes and

even some of the conclusions of Benedict and her colleagues, for the specific issues that preoccupied the Seligmans included Japanese morality, characteristics of Japanese modernity and, above all, national character. The intellectual-historical significance of the Seligmans' work on Japan and their broader contributions to the study of national character thus merit more attention than they have received so far.³

But this chapter is also a story of what did not happen. And it is this story of 'lack' that explains why the Seligmans' intellectual contributions have remained in obscurity. Unlike Benedict, whose *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* sold hundreds of thousands of copies in America (and millions in Japan), Charles and Brenda Seligman only ever published two short lectures on the subject after their trip, both of which were by Charles and originally delivered orally to a limited audience. Furthermore, unlike Benedict, for whom decoding Japanese culture was an integral part of the Allies' war effort and subsequent programme for peace, the Seligmans can only occupy a comparatively modest place in the 'new international history' of the Second World War. Despite the ascendancy of the 'New Diplomacy' (in pursuit of a democratised foreign policy grounded in the power of public opinion) during the 1920s, and despite the increased public relevance of Japan in the geopolitical context of the 1930s, the Seligmans made no attempt to deploy their insights in the service of international relations.⁴ The Seligmans, in other words, made little effort to enable the 'democratisation of academic knowledge' concerning Japan and its national character, despite the fact that there were clear opportunities and rationales for such an endeavour in interwar Britain.⁵ Throughout, one fundamental obstacle prevented the couple from undertaking more substantial intellectual and public engagement on the subject of Japan: Charles did not think that he had expertise in the subject.

This chapter, then, considers the historical (in)significance of the Seligmans as reluctant pioneers in the study of (Japanese) national character. I approach this question in two ways. First, I take an intellectual-historical approach to consider how and why the two British anthropologists came to break new intellectual ground with their analysis of the Japanese. Second, I turn to social- and cultural-historical questions of 'throw' to reflect on the limited impact of their work.⁶ I focus on the infrequency and reluctance with which they shared their observations upon their return, and discuss what their behaviour might reveal about the role of disciplinary expectations, personal proclivities and gender in enabling/disabling the democratisation of academic knowledge in interwar Britain.

The Seligmans' significance

Charles Seligman was born in 1873. He developed a passion for biology as a schoolboy and went on to pursue medicine at St Thomas's Hospital, where he became a house physician upon qualification. But a series of chance encounters led Charles to shift his career to anthropology. The most significant of these was the Cambridge Torres Strait Expedition (1898) organised by Alfred Haddon – arguably the single most important expedition in the history of British anthropology that established fieldwork as the methodological bedrock of the discipline.⁷ Charles originally joined as a pathologist and expert in tropical diseases, but the expedition enabled Charles, then aged twenty-four, to acquire a taste for ethnological and psychological investigation as he threw himself into fieldwork among the people of Cape York peninsula and Thursday Island. Captivated by this experience, Charles deepened his new interest through a further expedition to New Guinea (1904), before making a full transition to anthropology in 1910: he took up an appointment as Lecturer in Ethnology at the London School of Economics and became professor three years later. Charles's reputation has long been overshadowed by that of his student, Bronislaw Malinowski, one of the most charismatic and influential social anthropologists of the twentieth century. But in his own lifetime, Charles was one of Britain's leading anthropologists, serving as president of the Royal Anthropological Institute (RAI) from 1923 to 1925.

Charles was assisted in much of his professional work by his wife Brenda (née Salaman) (1883–1965). Brenda gave up her study of pre-medical biology upon her marriage to Charles, and thereafter became his collaborator, accompanying her husband on all his expeditions and co-authoring the resultant works. Most notably, they conducted an ethnological study of the Veddas, Sri Lanka's remaining aboriginal culture (1907–8), and undertook a major survey of Sudan based on multiple field trips, the latter culminating in the publication of *The Pagan Tribes of the Nilotic Sudan* (1932). The Seligmans' approach to the study of these so-called 'primitive' communities was multifaceted (and transcended the conventional lines of intra-disciplinary rivalry), covering physical anthropology, material culture, ethnography, cultural history and the prehistory of the region.⁸ As his close friend, the psychologist C. S. Myers, was later to note, Charles stood 'unrivalled in the breadth of his interests'.⁹

At first sight, the Seligmans' tour of the Far East in 1929–30 – a visit to the 'non-primitive' societies of Japan and China – appears to sit outside even their wide-ranging set of anthropological interests. Rather, a recurrent explanation for the trip, as provided in the numerous biographical

sketches of Charles and Brenda in their obituaries, highlighted the fact that the couple were keen collectors of Far Eastern (especially Chinese) art, and that it was this passion for an 'aesthetic hobby' that drove them to the region.¹⁰ This explanation, however, is insufficient. A closer inspection of Charles's intellectual output preceding the 1929–30 trip reveals a broader and deeper engagement with the Far East that extended beyond aesthetics.

Most significantly, Charles's presidential address to the RAI in 1924 included an extensive discussion of the difference between the characters of the Japanese and the Chinese. The broader subject of his lecture was 'Anthropology and psychology: a study of some points of contact', and Charles's intention in discussing the Japanese and Chinese 'dispositions' (Charles's own term) was to highlight – in front of an anthropological audience – the utility of C. G. Jung's theory of 'psychological types' (what may now be familiar to us as 'personality types').¹¹ More specifically, Charles deployed Jung's distinction between 'extravert' and 'introvert' types to claim that the Japanese were a nation of extraverts, while the Chinese were a nation of introverts.

Charles had not yet visited the two countries at the time of his presidential address; nor is there any indication that he had ever encountered any Japanese or Chinese individuals in person. But he justified these categorisations by quoting at length passages from books on Japanese and Chinese cultures written by Japanese and Chinese authors (which were available in English), relying on their insights as if such authors fulfilled the function of 'native informants'. In these books, the natives themselves had reflected on their differing national dispositions, contrasting Japan's readiness for adopting foreign learning to China's more reserved attitudes (Liang Qichao), and characterising the Japanese as a people who 'as a whole are not a people with much aptitude for deep metaphysical ways of thinking' (Yoshisaburō Okakura).¹²

What is perplexing about Charles's discussion here is not so much the specific conclusions he reached about the Japanese and Chinese types, as his choice to speak on such a subject at length in his presidential address to the RAI. After all, the overarching aim of the lecture was to advance the field of anthropology – and to do so by bringing his colleagues' attention to 'a little-known borderland where social anthropology, psychology and genetics meet in common biological kinship'.¹³ In the same lecture, Charles did also apply his Jungian typology to a number of 'tribes' – the more familiar subject of anthropology – whom he discussed under the heading of 'the types among savages'.¹⁴ The Japanese and Chinese were conversely classified under 'the types among civilized people'.¹⁵ Charles's lecture, then, not only advanced the cross-fertilisation between

anthropology and psychology for thinking about human character, but effectively extended the scope of anthropological analysis to include modern non-Western societies.

It follows that the trip to Japan and China in 1929–30 provided Charles with a welcome opportunity to make empirical observations about societies that he had already considered as an armchair anthropologist. And indeed, the visit stimulated Charles's intellectual interests in numerous ways. For instance, Japan, as a largely 'derivative' civilisation founded on borrowed ideas from China and more recently the West, stoked his (quasi-diffusionist) curiosity. He was later to declare in a lecture, 'as a study in cultural contact Japan is an astounding place to the anthropologist'.¹⁶ But as one might expect, a key topic of investigation to which many of his empirical observations were directed was the question of 'types'. Charles's first-hand encounter with the natives of Japan enabled him to validate his Jungian hypothesis that the Japanese were 'extravert', a type now defined as a person whose 'interest goes out immediately to surrounding objects and people . . . there is little tendency to abstruse the mediation or desire to transcend the experience by abstract reasoning or to substitute for it ideal constructions'.¹⁷ Charles's formal justification for his classification (given in his lectures on Japan after the trip) remained modern Japan's recent displays of its exceptional readiness to adopt Western civilisation.¹⁸ The trip, after all, had exposed him and Brenda to abundant examples of Japan's Westernisation, from the country's industrialisation to the apparent popularity of European food and clothing.¹⁹ But in his private travel journal, he provided an additional reason: the Japanese were a 'careless, happy go-lucky people'.²⁰

Yet the same trip also newly exposed Charles and Brenda to the empirical complexity of Japanese 'culture contact' which, in turn, demanded theoretical fine-tuning. Based on what he had previously read about the Japanese character, it appears that Charles had originally conceptualised Japanese modernisation in linear terms – that Japan's 'extravert' willingness to adopt Western culture must necessarily imply the decline of its pre-Western, local custom. But his trip challenged this *a priori* assumption. Once in Japan, both Charles and Brenda were struck by the fact that the Japanese were 'above all a ritualist' people and remained so even after their extensive importation of Western ways of life.²¹ To be sure, Charles was already familiar with Japan's famously ritualistic tea ceremony from his reading of two English-language classics on Japanese culture: the art critic Kakuzō Okakura's *The Book of Tea* (1906) and the British Japanologist Basil Hall Chamberlain's *Things Japanese* (1890). But he had previously assumed that such an 'introvert' practice amounted to a bygone culture, found once upon a time among the 'upper classes of Japan'.²² Yet what he

observed in the country newly revealed to him the continued centrality of ritualism in modern Japanese life: the emphasis on correct posture, correct arrangement of objects in the household, and (the most perplexing for Brenda) the need to take one's shoes off even to see a garden, were all cases in point.²³ In Japan, Charles consequently wrote (directly adopting an observation originally made by Brenda in her travel journal), there was not so much a 'blending of cultures' as a 'kaleidoscopic mixture' of Japanese and foreign elements.²⁴ And he linked this, too, to questions about the Japanese disposition. Among a 'less hardy people', Charles speculated, such a civilisational incoherence might produce 'an almost intolerable strain' – so what was special about the Japanese? Jung, again, seemed to offer the answer, as Charles saw promise in the Jungian notion of 'compensation'. Charles postulated that Japan's relentless ceremonial behaviour, far from representing a contradiction of their 'extravert' disposition, amounted to an instance of a 'consciously arrived at compensation' – a deliberate attempt by the Japanese to provide some sort of 'correction' or counterbalancing to their psychological disposition by means of custom and tradition.²⁵ Clearly, then, the field trip to Japan deepened Charles's appreciation of Jungian psychological theory and its applicability to understanding modern national characters.

Likewise, Charles's experience in China enabled him to refine his thinking. As we saw earlier, Seligman had previously classified the Chinese as 'introvert' based on what he had read about their reluctance to adopt foreign cultures. But his first-hand encounter suggested that the Chinese were at least as extravert as the Japanese.²⁶ His empirical evidence for this was the fact that the Chinese seemed 'more loquacious than the Japanese . . . they talk more in their streets and railway carriages'.²⁷ Underpinning this seemingly mundane observation was a renewed recognition of plurality within a given national group and, in particular, the relevance of 'class'.²⁸ His original mistake, as he subsequently noted, had arisen from viewing the elite 'literary or Confucian man' as 'the representative' of the Chinese attitude to life, when in fact such a man was the 'result of a special tradition and training' and 'never adopted by more than a small proportion of the population'.²⁹

Importantly, in both orientation and substance, Charles's analysis of the Japanese and Chinese 'types' anticipated the intellectual concerns of the (much better-known) 'Culture and Personality' movement that was to emerge in the US in the 1930s. Like Charles's approach, culture and personality studies were born out of a cross-fertilisation between anthropology and the psychological sciences. Its proponents saw as their main task the interpretation of 'character structures' that underpinned any given social (national) group. They did so by searching for psychological

uniformities among individuals in the same social group, an approach that enabled development by the 1940s of what came to be distinctively known as ‘national character studies’.³⁰ A leading figure within this movement, alongside other notable anthropological luminaries such as Margaret Mead and Edward Sapir (both students of Franz Boas), was Ruth Benedict. Benedict’s *Patterns of Culture* (1934) laid a foundation for the movement by advancing the idea that a ‘culture, like an individual, is a more or less consistent pattern of thought and action’.³¹ To demonstrate this point through a comparison of four ‘primitive’ cultures (the Plain Indians, the Zuni, the Dobu and the Kwakiutl), Benedict adopted Nietzsche’s opposition between ‘Apollonian’ and ‘Dionysian’ tendencies, an opposition not unlike that which Charles made between introverts and extraverts. (Charles himself thought Benedict’s terms referred to the same differences in temperament as his own Jungian typology.³²)

Crucially, the recognition that a given community might be held together by a ‘culture pattern’ (consisting of shared norms, values and practices, including psychological characteristics) also raised the possibility for Benedict and her colleagues that such a perspective might even be usefully applied to the study of ‘non-primitive’ societies – including their own. They debated the intellectual potential of such a seemingly experimental research agenda in the 1930s before the international-political events of the 1940s brought a new urgency to its undertaking: the need to understand America’s enemies – the Germans and the Japanese. As a study of the Japanese national character, Benedict’s *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* (1946) – based on her wartime research conducted for the US Office of War Information – was a direct outcome of this timely intersection between the intellectual fertilisations and the political expediencies of mid-century America.³³

What clearly drove the intellectual convergence between Charles and his American counterparts was the growing trans-disciplinary influence of psychology on both sides of the Atlantic. US anthropologists such as Mead and Benedict were able to deepen their appreciation of psychological theories by coming into contact with ‘neo-Freudians’ (including Jewish émigré analysts) in the 1930s.³⁴ In Charles’s case, like many British anthropologists and other academics of his generation, he furthered his interest in psychology through his work treating shell-shocked soldiers during the First World War, becoming acquainted with Freudian and Jungian theories.³⁵ The result of this trans-Atlantic parallel was that from 1924 onwards and especially following his trip to Japan and China in 1929–30, Charles was effectively making the same analytic moves as the US pioneers. And to start with (until the mid-1930s when he began discussing the works of Mead and Benedict), he was doing so independently – in the absence

of any significant trans-Atlantic diffusion of knowledge.³⁶ Charles was, in this sense, a (the) true pioneer. But where he diverged from the Americans was that he demonstrated virtually no self-reflexivity as to how his application of psychological anthropology to 'non-primitive' societies might be pushing the boundaries of his discipline. By contrast, Benedict and her collaborators were deeply conscious of the ways in which extending their research to complex, modern societies would disrupt, and innovate, the core premises of the discipline of anthropology.³⁷ This difference in attitude, as we will see, amounted to a key fault line that led the Americans to disseminate their insights more proactively than Charles.

His lack of reflection notwithstanding, Charles not only anticipated the broad orientation of the culture and personality movement, but also anticipated certain specific observations about Japanese culture that would later be made by Benedict. Most notably, he noted the relative absence of a 'sense of sin' among the Japanese. His point was not that the Japanese were irreligious; rather, morality in Japan appeared to him to be 'predominantly of the group' and largely a 'matter of aesthetics'.³⁸ (The Japanese proclivities for admiring suicide to him suggested an excessive 'sense of decorum'.³⁹) Here, Charles's suggestion of an externally sanctioned morality in Japan ('morality of the group'), together with his focus on guilt as a criterion for distinguishing between Japan and his own culture, demonstrate a significant congruence with Benedict's subsequent interpretation of Japanese morality. *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* became globally well known and widely debated for the seemingly original dichotomy it proposed between Japan's 'shame culture' and America's 'guilt culture'.⁴⁰

Where Charles's analysis differed from Benedict's, as well as culture and personality studies more broadly, was in his approach to questions of race and class. With regards to race, the culture and personality approach rested on a firm rejection of biological determinism.⁴¹ Culture, in this context, replaced (and became the functional equivalent of) race as the key to understanding human difference.⁴² This move against biological determinism is unsurprising given that many of the movement's leading figures, including Benedict herself, were students of Franz Boas. By comparison, Charles's relationship to biological determinism was more ambiguous, for he never rejected the possibility of innate genetic differences in temperament between different human groups (or 'races' as he referred to them). This remained the case, even as he increasingly acknowledged the 'difficulty' of proving such genetic differences in practice, and became more cognisant over time of the role of social 'environment' (such as Confucian training in the case of Chinese elites) in cultivating introvert or extravert dispositions.⁴³

For Charles, as we have seen, his increasing recognition of the role of social environmental factors was closely linked to his growing sensitivity to the relevance of class. Benedict, conversely, was more inclined to assume that a given psychological characteristic would be uniformly present across the whole of a modern complex nation. This was certainly true of her analysis of Japan. One of the major criticisms of *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* – including those levelled by Japanese scholars at the time of the book's publication – was that she mistook a 'shame culture' that was really restricted to the samurai class for the culture of the entire Japanese nation.⁴⁴ Such an analytical divergence between Charles and Benedict was unlikely to have been coincidental. Whereas Charles was able to refine his understanding of the internal plurality of the Japanese and Chinese characters by travelling to the Far East, Benedict wrote her 300-page study of the Japanese by relying exclusively on secondary sources, some Japanese films she had watched, and interviews she had conducted with Japanese immigrants living in America.⁴⁵ Because Benedict was undertaking the research at a time when her country was at war with her research subjects, she was denied the opportunity to conduct what was surely the core business of anthropology: fieldwork.

The Seligman's insignificance

Charles Seligman broke new ground with his psycho-anthropological analysis of Japanese and Chinese national characters. And yet his engagement with the subject also amounted to a missed opportunity. He only ever gave two lectures on this subject after his Far Eastern tour – both of which were delivered to a somewhat narrow audience: the Japan Society in London (upon the society's invitation) and the Midland Medical Society. The lectures were subsequently published in the two societies' dedicated journals. Charles never developed his research on Japanese and Chinese national characters any further.⁴⁶ Neither of his two papers on Japan (or any other work by Charles, for that matter) was cited in *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* despite their obvious relevance, and it seems unlikely that Benedict ever came across his perspectives on Japan.⁴⁷

Charles died in September 1940, depriving him of the opportunity to read *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*. Nor did he have the chance to put his knowledge of the Japanese national character in the service of the Allies' war efforts, unlike his American counterpart. But even during the 1930s when Japan was already in the public spotlight following its invasion of Manchuria (1931) and still more the outbreak of Japan's full-scale war with China (1938), Charles never ventured to offer his views in

the public domain. One might imagine that an intellectual of a different persona, if equipped with the same knowledge and experience as Charles, might have viewed the geopolitical developments of the 1930s as a timely opportunity to disseminate the idea of the 'extravert' Japanese; they might have speculated publicly on what such a 'psychological type' might have to do with militarism and territorial expansion. But this was not the path Charles chose. Instead, on those limited occasions after the trip when he did address the subject of modern Japan, he did so hesitantly, refusing to claim any expertise in the subject matter. Why was this the case? And what might his reluctance reveal about the conditions of (im)possibility for the democratisation of academic knowledge?

A cursory comparison with the roads taken by other British academic travellers of the time suggests the dissemination channels that might have been open to Charles, had he had the intention of making his insights accessible. A common practice among intellectuals visiting the Far East during this period was to contribute travel accounts of their trips to leading periodicals, and then publish them as travelogues. Thus when Arnold J. Toynbee visited Japan and China in the same year as the Seligmans, he wrote essays recording his impressions for the *Contemporary Review* and the *Nation and Athenaeum*, which eventually formed the basis of his travelogue, *A Journey to China or Things Which Are Seen* (1931). We might, moreover, draw a direct connection between such dissemination efforts and the idea of 'democratisation', for linking the two was the growing commitment to liberal internationalism (and the League of Nations as its embodiment) that emerged in the wake of the devastations of the First World War. An important ideal in this context was that of the 'New Diplomacy', a move towards the democratisation of foreign policy by promoting open discussion and, most importantly, the power of public opinion.⁴⁸ Liberal intellectuals like Toynbee, and historians in particular, were at the forefront of this movement. One direct consequence of this burgeoning democratic-internationalist consciousness was a vogue for a public education in 'World History' that emphatically incorporated histories of the non-West.⁴⁹ In Toynbee's case, his insights from his Far Eastern tour fed directly into his multi-civilisational *A Study of History* (first volume published in 1934).⁵⁰ Eileen Power, another historian, visited Japan and China in 1920–21 and shared her views (especially her admiration for China) in a radio broadcast on world history.⁵¹ As for H.G. Wells, he wrote his best-selling *The Outline of History* (1920) as an armchair intellectual. But as a correspondent attending the Washington Naval Conference (1921–22), he made first-hand observations about the (non-democratic) temperament of the Japanese

delegates for a special series in the *Daily Mail*.⁵² There was, then, fertile ground in interwar Britain for disseminating public intellectual observations concerning non-Western – and not least Far Eastern – cultures, and it is not difficult to imagine that Charles, had he been so inclined, could have complemented the stream of historical contributions by presenting an anthropological alternative.

Charles, after all, was not entirely averse to media engagement. It is certainly true that he wrote largely for an academic audience; he was also a shy personality, not naturally inclined to embrace the public spotlight. He did not, in this sense, exhibit a ‘democratising’ impulse to the same extent as the above-mentioned historians. But even Charles was an occasional commentator for the BBC, who most notably delivered an ‘interactive’ radio broadcast on dreams and the unconsciousness in 1931 (having asked audience members to mail descriptions of their dreams in advance).⁵³

Taken together, it seems fair to assume that Charles did not more widely disseminate his observations of Japan, not because he could not, but rather because he chose not to. And indeed, not only did he refrain from communicating those insights directly to the public, he showed reluctance even in sharing them within more closed, academic circles. The most likely reason for this exceptional diffidence was Charles’s ideas about the professional expectations of his discipline, and his resultant refusal to claim expertise in Japan.

From his standpoint, more specifically, his observations of the Japanese likely did not meet the required standards of what constituted ‘fieldwork’ in academic anthropology. It is worth recalling here that Charles’s most foundational experience as an anthropologist was the Torres Strait Expedition. It was this experience of fieldwork that had captured the young Charles’s imagination, altering the course of his life. For the members of the expedition more broadly, their ethnographic experience in the Torres Strait defined the methodological identity of what came to be known as ‘The Cambridge School’. Charles was one of the School’s chief active representatives, and it is therefore unsurprising that he has been retrospectively described as a scholar with a ‘strong sense of “field-work”’.⁵⁴ Charles once even avowed that ‘field research in anthropology is what the blood of martyrs is to the Church’.⁵⁵

If his faith was so unfaltering, what exactly were the requirements of professional anthropological fieldwork to which he was so devoted? W.H.R. Rivers, another alumnus of the Torres Strait Expedition with whom Charles trained younger generations of fieldworkers, provided a programmatic systematisation of the Cambridge School’s approach.⁵⁶ Among the key ideas was the insistence that the investigator’s ‘first duty’ was to ‘acquire as completely as possible’ a knowledge of the native language; linguistic

access was what distinguished 'intensive study' from mere 'survey work'.⁵⁷ The Seligmans' expeditions ordinarily fulfilled this requirement: Brenda, for instance, applied herself to learning Arabic when the couple undertook their study of Sudan. Judged by the Seligmans' standards, then, their trip to the Far East most certainly failed to meet the criteria for fieldwork. Neither Charles nor Brenda learnt the native languages during their six-month tour, and it is telling that Charles subsequently referred to his experience making first-hand observations in the region as 'a very little practical experience'.⁵⁸

If inadequate research methods likely contributed to Charles's reservations about disseminating his insights, is it possible that he viewed the subject matter as inappropriate too? Put differently, was Japan too 'modern' and too 'advanced' a society to constitute a proper subject of anthropological research? There is lingering ambiguity on this question across his texts. On the one hand, as we have seen, his visit led him to comment explicitly on the 'astounding' value of modern Japan as a case study for anthropological research, and for investigating 'culture contact' in particular. Earlier, he had also chosen to speak at length on the Japanese character in a presidential address to the RAI. And yet unlike Benedict and her colleagues who clearly saw that applying an anthropological approach to modern, complex societies would amount to a paradigm shift that would change the very identity and utility of their discipline, at no point did Charles write self-reflexively about what it might mean for him, as an anthropologist, to be taking an interest in Japan. Instead, he modestly denied expertise in the country when speaking publicly, even as he was ironically simultaneously advancing psycho-anthropological analyses that were innovative – and would be recognised as such when the same analyses were later proffered by culture and personality studies.⁵⁹ Is it possible, then, that Charles simply did not (fully) believe he was practising his own discipline when commenting on Japan? For him, did the boundaries of anthropology stay intact around the study of 'backward' peoples, with the Japanese remaining outside?

A similar demarcation of disciplinary boundaries is also evident from his attitudes to policy engagement. Just as he was not entirely averse to making media appearances, Charles was not dismissive of policy work. He was, in fact, explicitly supportive of 'Applied Anthropology', recommending that 'every government should appoint trained anthropologists'.⁶⁰ But in the same context, he also categorically stated that these experts' task was to 'save the backward races from extinction and enable them to adapt to new circumstances'.⁶¹ Such a confined, specifically colonial, conception of the discipline's utility was likely reciprocated

by British government officials. To understand Japanese politics and culture during the interwar and wartime years, the Foreign Office and the War Office routinely relied on the first-hand insights of British foreign correspondents as well as academic analyses by historians and economists (sometimes through the facilitation of Chatham House). But the idea of enlisting the service of a professionally trained anthropologist for the study of a rival 'advanced' nation appears to have lain beyond the scope of their imagination.

The Japanese would have no doubt been reassured by Charles's drawing of his disciplinary boundaries, had they known. After all, one of Japan's utmost concerns since the mid-nineteenth century was to defy European perceptions of the Japanese as 'backward': gaining Western recognition of Japan's 'civilised' status was viewed as a *sine qua non* of the country's struggle for sovereign survival in a Western-dominated world of empires. Under these circumstances, from the turn of the twentieth century, Japan developed a particularly uneasy relationship with anthropology. Because anthropology was understood as a Western discipline dedicated to the study of 'primitive' races (and practically and ideologically linked to colonialism), Japan's own engagement with the discipline was driven by one overarching imperative: the Japanese must become the observer, not the observed.⁶² It is thus telling that when the Seligmans interacted with Japanese anthropologists during their visit, the subject of their exchange was not contemporary Japanese culture, but the Ainu – the indigenous people of northern Japan – who formed the object of the Japanese' own anthropological gaze.⁶³

Finally, one further factor accounts for the limited impact of the Seligmans' work on Japan: Brenda and her professional marginalisation. Much of this chapter has so far focused on Charles, precisely because the Seligmans' findings on Japan were communicated solely by Charles, and not co-authored or published separately by Brenda. Only Brenda's unpublished travel journal provides us with a glimpse of her own thoughts. As we have seen, Charles's lectures on Japan in fact drew on notes from Brenda's journal as well as his own – something that he duly acknowledged at the beginning of each lecture. It remains the case, nonetheless, that only Charles was receiving the invitations to speak. This inequality mirrored the fact that whereas Charles held a prestigious professorship at the LSE and became president of the RAI, Brenda, either because of her gender and/or lack of academic training, held no formal academic post.⁶⁴ (The other female anthropologist of our story, Ruth Benedict, completed a PhD in anthropology at Columbia University in 1923 and joined the faculty thereafter.⁶⁵) Although Brenda developed her own expertise (distinct

from Charles's) in kinship studies, her independent research publications amounted only to about half a dozen papers; her single-authored writings were chiefly reviews of other scholars' work.⁶⁶

As a female participant in anthropological research, Brenda's experience was not an exceptionally unfortunate one. Quite the opposite, she was successful relative to other female participants in gaining recognition for her work even in the early years – and over the course of her career, outstandingly successful in gaining the respect of her (including male) colleagues.⁶⁷ Those colleagues were unreserved in acknowledging Brenda's talent as an anthropologist and, above all, the profound impact she made on Charles's scholarship.⁶⁸ (In Haddon's words, the 'most important event in Seligman's career' was his marriage to Brenda.⁶⁹) Still, informal recognition is one thing, and formal recognition is another. With no formal academic post and relatively limited opportunities to build her reputational capital by presenting her independent thoughts, it is unsurprising that not only for the 1930s but also the war years once Charles was deceased, there is no record of Brenda publicly proffering anthropological perspectives in response to unfolding global-imperial events.

The postwar years did see some changes, however, as Brenda began a fresh life as a widow. During those years, she grew in prominence, facilitated perhaps by her newly increased independence (and move from Oxford, where she had lived with Charles, to London), as well as broader institutional shifts towards greater integration of women within the academy.⁷⁰ She became more involved in the RAI, and in 1959, succeeded A. R. Radcliffe-Brown as the president of the Association of Social Anthropologists. When she finally published a book of her own in 1962, the subject was none other than the Ainu, the aforementioned indigenous people of northern Japan.

Ainu Creed and Cult (1962) was a book edited by Brenda, and drew not on her own research, but on material written or collected by the then deceased Neil Gordon Munro (1863–1942). Munro was a Scottish physician and a long-term resident of Japan who had developed a keen interest in Ainu culture and history. Brenda and Charles had met Munro during their trip to Japan. Thereafter, the Seligmans, and Charles in particular until his death, proactively supported Munro's research as an independent scholar, securing funding from the Rockefeller Foundation on Munro's behalf and providing substantive advice on Munro's investigations through regular correspondence.⁷¹ In Charles's view, the indigenous people of Japan clearly represented a subject to which he felt entitled to speak; here, he had expertise worth sharing.

Conclusion

According to his friends and colleagues, Charles Seligman was a ‘modest’ and ‘reticent’ scholar who ‘quietly exerted’ influence; as an anthropologist, he displayed ‘unrivalled . . . thoroughness, integrity and energy’, but ‘little love – nor perhaps talent – for far-flung speculations’.⁷² These characterisations by those who knew him best are consistent with the quietly pioneering way in which Charles approached his anthropological study of modern Japan. Perhaps, in the end, he was simply not self-enterprising enough. But was his ‘introvert’ disposition a scholarly virtue, or was it a vice? Answers to this question will no doubt vary. There is no denying, however, that Charles and Brenda’s innovative ideas about Japan and national character only had a limited throw within interwar Britain and beyond.

An essential precondition for the democratisation of knowledge is that the intellectuals themselves believe that their knowledge is worth sharing with the world. Charles Seligman, in his refusal to claim expertise on Japan – and in his reluctance to disseminate his thoughts on the subject – was perhaps holding to the highest standards of professional anthropology as they existed at the time. Yet in so doing, he also missed out on an opportunity – to make a paradigm-shifting impact on his discipline, and a timely contribution to the democratisation of knowledge about the world beyond Britain.

Notes

1. Peter Mandler, *Return from the Natives: How Margaret Mead Won the Second World War and Lost the Cold War* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2013).
2. Mandler, *Return from the Natives*, chs 4–5.
3. Only a few works have cited Charles Seligman’s writings on Japanese national character: Hidetoshi Katō, ‘Bunkajinruigaku ni okeru kokuminsei no shomondai’ [The question of national character in cultural anthropology], *Jinbun gakuho*, 7 (1957), p. 56; Bernard C. Hennessy, ‘Psycho-cultural Studies of National Character: Relevance for International Relations’, *Background*, 6.1 (1962), p. 31. Milton Singer, ‘A Survey of Culture and Personality Theory and Research’, in B. Kaplan (ed.), *Studying Personality Cross-culturally* (Evanston, IL: Row, Peterson, 1961), pp. 11–13, is a rare work that recognises Charles as a British counterpart to the American ‘Culture and Personality’ school.
4. On the ‘New Diplomacy’ and the democratisation of foreign policy, see Helen McCarthy, *The British People and the League of Nations: Democracy, Citizenship and Internationalism, c. 1918–45* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011).
5. The phrase ‘democratisation of academic knowledge’ is taken from Peter Mandler, ‘The Language of Social Science in Everyday Life’, *History of the Human Sciences*, 32.1 (2019), p. 69.

6. On the need to think about a text's impact or 'throw', see Peter Mandler, 'The Problem with Cultural History', *Cultural and Social History*, 1.1 (2004), pp. 94–117.
7. George W. Stocking Jr., *After Tylor: British Social Anthropology, 1888–1951* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995), pp. 98–115.
8. On the period's theoretical controversies, see Stocking, *After Tylor*.
9. C.S. Myers, 'Charles Gabriel Seligman 1873–1940', *Obituary Notices of Fellows of the Royal Society*, 10 (1941), p. 637.
10. Myers, 'Charles Gabriel Seligman 1873–1940', p. 636; Meyer Fortes, 'Charles Gabriel Seligman, 1873–1940', *Man*, 41 (1941), p. 5.
11. C.G. Seligman, 'Anthropology and Psychology: A Study of Some Points of Contact', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, 54 (1924), pp. 13–46.
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30. See Mandler, *Return from the Natives*; Robert A. LeVine, 'Culture and Personality Studies: Myth and History', *Journal of Personality*, 69.6 (2001), pp. 803–18.
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33. Mandler, *Return from the Natives*, esp. ch. 4. As Mandler shows, another anthropologist studying Japanese national character for the same reason was Geoffrey Gorer, Benedict's close colleague.
34. Mandler, *Return from the Natives*, pp. 25–8, 54–6.
35. On Charles's engagement with psychology, see Erik Linstrum, *Ruling Minds: Psychology in the British Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016), ch. 2.
36. For Charles's engagement with 'culture and personality', see n. 32 above.
37. Mandler, *Return from the Natives*, ch. 4. The 1930s also saw A.R. Radcliffe-Brown (then based at the University of Chicago) spearhead an initiative to extend the study of social anthropology to 'advanced societies'; see his 'Introduction' to John F. Embree, *Suye Mura: A Japanese Village* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1939), p. viii.
38. Seligman, 'Japanese Temperament', pp. 131–2; Seligman, 'Chinese and Japanese', pp. 281–2.
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49. Chika Tonooka, 'World History's Eurocentric Moment? British Internationalism in the Age of Asian Nationalism, c.1905–1931', *Modern Intellectual History*, 18 (2021), pp. 95–120.
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57. Stocking, *After Tylor*, pp. 121–2.
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60. C.G. Seligman, 'Applied Anthropology', in *Encyclopaedia Britannica: A Dictionary of Arts, Sciences, Literature and General Information*, 13th edn (London: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1926), p. 142.
61. C.G. Seligman, 'Applied Anthropology', p. 142.
62. Makito Saya, *Minzokugaku, Taiwan, kokusai renmei: Yanagita Kunio to Nitobe Inazō* [Folk studies, Taiwan, the League of Nations: Kunio Yanagita and Inazō Nitobe] (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 2015), pp. 48–56.
63. 'Seriguman kyōjyū no jinruigaku kyōshitsu hōmon' [Professor Seligman's visit to the department of anthropology], *Jinruigaku zasshi*, 44 (1929), p. 571. They met Ryō Matsumura, an anthropologist at the Tokyo Imperial University.
64. Her notable affiliations were Fellowship of the RAI and membership of the committee of Section H of the British Association for the Advancement of Science.
65. Benedict was appointed associate professor in 1936, and then professor in 1948, two months before her death. On the negative impact of her gender on her career, see Lyn Schumaker, 'Women in the Field in the Twentieth Century: Revolution, Involution, Devolution?', in Henrika Kuklick (ed.), *New History of Anthropology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), p. 281.
66. For an overview of her career, see Meyer Fortes, 'Brenda Zara Seligman, 1882–1965: A Memoir', *Man*, 65 (1965), pp. 177–81.
67. Schumaker, 'Women in the Field', pp. 278–9.
68. Fortes, 'Brenda Zara Seligman', p. 180; Myers, 'Charles Seligman', p. 638; Meyer Fortes, 'Charles Gabriel Seligman, 1873–1940', *Man*, 41 (1941), p. 3; *The Times*, 20 September 1940, p. 7; I. Schapera (ed.), *Studies in Kinship and Marriage: Dedicated to Brenda Z. Seligman on Her 80th Birthday* (London: Royal Anthropological Institute, 1963).
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Chapter 6

An American Mass Observer among the natives: Robert Jackson Alexander in Second World War Britain

Lawrence Black*

The archives of Robert Jackson Alexander (1918–2010), a Professor of Latin American trade unionism and the global non-Soviet left, might not seem propitious sources for social and political historians of Second World War Britain. But Alexander wrote letters galore about his life as a General Infantryman (GI) in Britain as Group Operations Clerk to the US Air Force's 95th Bombardment Group between April 1943 and June 1945. He was stationed in Suffolk, then Cambridgeshire and from July 1944 at Horham airfield in Suffolk. By dint of his administrative position, Alexander did not cross the channel or see direct combat, but travelled extensively within Britain. He documented these trips as a tourist-cum-flaneur – observing cities, cathedrals, architecture, people; visiting party conferences and HQs, meeting an international mix of political operatives; leading a rich cultural life – in regular, lengthy, prosaic, mostly typed letters to his parents in Leonia, New Jersey. His father Ralph, a Columbia University marketing professor, was a truck driver in the First World War, although also saw no direct conflict.¹

And these were palpably reports as much as missives – *aides mémoires* for whom he had met, where, when, a bank of contacts, ideas and opinion. While stationed in Britain, Alexander read Charles Dickens's *American Notes*, about Dickens's 1842 tour of the US, and reflected on the nations' respective situations. Dickens had found Britain better resourced, more technologically advanced and civilised compared to the violence

and slavery of the US. By 1943, all that remained of Dickens's vision to Alexander was that Britain was older and felt superior towards US culture.² Like Dickens, Alexander turned his attention to national cultures, with a dash of the political voyeur. He was also something of an amateur Pevsner – commenting on architecture, making pilgrimages to cathedrals and devoted to heritage. He offers historians a non-indigenous perspective on British society and politics – if you will, an American Mass Observer.

Alexander was not the only American so engaged. Anthropologist Margaret Mead arrived in England in July 1943, two months after Alexander. Mead was tasked by US and UK authorities with researching and facilitating cultural understanding between the growing numbers of American GIs and their hosts. For Mead it was an opportunity to test theses, displaced as she was from the South Pacific, on a different set of natives and cultures. Like Alexander, Mead travelled around the UK, with an eye for the everyday. Mead focused on the different scale of the two countries, how diminutive Britain had developed complex and intricate hierarchies; on the American slouch and tendency to talk big; on differences in dating practices between the social GIs and more intimate, reserved Britons; on how Britons looked to history and deferred to authority where Americans were more forward-looking and self-confident; and how GIs were focused on getting home rather than understanding their allies. For Mead, these differences were not just intercultural, minor matters of national character, but were heightened by their apparent shared qualities and mutual knowledge. They were not to be denied or dismissed, but acknowledged, as Mead contended in radio broadcasts, films and articles on 'The Yank in Britain' and 'What is a date?'³

There is no hard evidence Alexander read Mead (or encountered Mass Observers), but he read the army press (*Stars & Stripes*, named after its First World War equivalent, was his favourite) which reported Mead's activity. Alexander's more amateur observations focused on similar topics to Mead's (politics aside – and as a reader of political runes he was, like many 1940s commentaries, frequently off-beam). He was forever contrasting the US and UK. There were clear resonances of Mead's thinking in Alexander's, and evidence of the percolation of social-scientific terminology. These intersections show the shared interests and concerns of the legions of amateur and expert social scientists at large in Britain.⁴

The US wartime diaspora was as social and cultural as military, Blower contends; only sixteen per cent of US military personnel saw combat.⁵ Alexander was an exemplar of this, and of the Meads, Mass Observers, Gorers and other social scientists honeycombing British society. That he

wrote in such quantities marked him out as an incessant recorder, archiver and diarist of his own experience. A 1942 survey found enlisted US soldiers were less likely to see a movie, read a book or write letters from England than when in the USA, but more likely to drink alcohol, play cards or date.⁶ Alexander was over here and left a rich archive, but was neither over-sexed nor idle. Even in a unit as active as the 95th, the first to bomb Berlin, there was spare time on base and as much as eight consecutive furlough days off it.⁷

Alexander's letters thus contribute to the history of the Second World War, a subject of perpetual academic interrogation and popular re-narrating.⁸ The GI 'occupation' of Britain – the shock troops of Americanisation, an ongoing presence – has been the subject of in-depth histories.⁹ GIs were imprinted on local memory (the 95th clubhouse is now a museum¹⁰) and popular histories.¹¹ As early as 1946 William Bostick illustrated an account of *England under G.I.'s Reign*.¹² Schrijvers has compared the GI experience across Europe and other GI missives have been collated to this end.¹³ They were a portal through which to examine race, gender and sexuality as the occupying forces brought a segregated military and an influx of men.¹⁴ Other trends have focused on military bases; emotional histories in the medium of letter-writing; veterans, masculinity and psychological impacts.¹⁵ Alexander was akin to a forerunner of Thorpe's trawl of local archives of political *Parties at War*.¹⁶ But Alexander makes no appearance in these studies. The uses of his army letters for historians are less in new interpretations of the war than in American perspectives of the British home front – offering multifaceted coverage and, like several other chapters in *Democratising the Discipline*, depicting how social-science minds intersected the banal and the macro.

Alexander's army

Before his deployment, Alexander was working at the Board of Economic Warfare and on a PhD at Columbia on Chilean labour relations. His politics were anti-Communist, before the Cold War. Radicalised by the Depression and a school trip in 1936 to Spain, Vienna and London, he had joined the New Jersey Young People's Socialist League (YPSL), a youth section of the Socialist Party (SPUSA). At Columbia from 1936 he was influenced by economist, former Wobbly and Mexican scholar, Frank Tannenbaum. The SPUSA split with an electorally minded social democratic group in 1936 – not that the party was beholden to communists. In 1937 it purged Trotskyists because, in Alexander's words, 'Bolshevism . . . had completely lost whatever passing attraction it might once have had'.

He quit the YPSL in 1940 over its opposition to US entry into the war.¹⁷ From the 1940s he wrote for the *New Leader*, a socialist paper which had adopted a liberal anti-Communist position. In Britain, Alexander presented *New Leader* journalist credentials – a letter from the managing editor, Daniel Bell.¹⁸

He found army life banal, both peripatetic and static – last-minute plans made for a febrile atmosphere of ‘rumor, intrigue and backstabbing’. So, not unlike politics. ‘There’s a song we . . . used to sing for the benefit of the Communists, “The line has changed again”’ and Alexander concluded it ‘should be the theme song for the army’. Hierarchy was at odds with his democratic instincts and Orwellian sense that the wrong people were in charge.¹⁹ If Eisenhower, Patton and Montgomery ‘get the war over with before the infantry catches up with me’, Alexander admitted, ‘that suits me just fine’. Although he felt it would enhance his scholarship: ‘to “absorb” different experiences . . . I’ll be a better historian and . . . teacher for having spent some time in the army’.²⁰ He was no shirker, spending September 1944 in Preston as a ‘stevedore’ (his term) preparing to establish allied airfields in Soviet Ukraine (‘Operation Frantic’).²¹

For Alexander, the problem was the calibre of his fellow recruits. The Mass Observer in their midst was alert to their ethnic, religious, regional and educational backgrounds. His Communist radar was triggered by one vocal New York Jewish recruit full of ‘definite ideas’. ‘Payday’ was for most ‘a sign for wine, women and gambling’. He also had a high opinion of himself: ‘I’ve got a better education than almost anyone – officer or enlisted man’.²² The routine ‘humiliations’ of military life offended Alexander’s sensibility – ‘stupid people make me mad . . . I don’t remember any such emotion in civilian life’.²³

He was too active to slouch and neither dated (or wrote about it) nor drank much. Once after he’d ‘got “oiled”’, he wrote ‘Beer is horrible stuff. I don’t know what people drink it for’. One lengthy epistle was penned on Valentine’s Day. Alexander admitted to ‘little interest in the Piccadilly commandos’ as the denizens of the red light district near Piccadilly Circus and the American Red Cross Rainbow Corner Club were known, but ‘a great deal of interest in the future of the British Labour party and the beauties of Canterbury Cathedral’.²⁴ Although, in summer 1943 he confessed to making a swift exit after being ‘given the glad eye by one of the ladies referred to here as “Piccadilly commandos”’.²⁵ Not that any other outcome would have been reported to his parents!

Similarly, Alexander’s political interest marked him apart from the average GI. Like Kowol’s *Blue Jerusalem*, his world view centred on politics and revealed a more diverse, active political culture than in many accounts, albeit he was applying and honing a social democratic outlook.

His observations *on* rather than from *within* national political assumptions made for a granular political ethnography in the vein of the Austrian journalist Egon Wertheimer's *Portrait of the Labour Party* (1929) or Retellack's study of German social democracy.²⁶

One reason Alexander's social life, tourism and political travelogue were foregrounded was that military matters were kept out of letters home. Even the weather was an 'official secret': nonetheless he reported 'shivering' in mid-summer 1943 despite sleeping under '4 blankets'. One method Alexander devised for navigating the censor was the egregious prolixity of his letters. One finished by admitting he was 'afraid I have driven the censor mad with this letter' and he was mostly 'able to get friendly officers to sign the letters, indicating they had censored them, without their actually bothering to read them'.²⁷

Towards the end of his tour Alexander summarised GIs' grievances, in Mead-like terms. The British were 'behind the times'; their government was 'aristocratic, dictatorial'; they were 'dirty', 'grasping', 'unfriendly', 'inefficient'; their weather was 'deplorable'. Alexander caveated this by wondering, 'how would New York have reacted had a million of its homes been wrecked in six months?' But he feared war had bred xenophobia. Vansittartism – the idea that Nazism built on inherent German characteristics – concerned him.²⁸ He opposed a punishing peace for Germany; despite 'all of the horror tales . . . we cannot condemn unborn generations to a life of slavery'.²⁹

After talking with a British soldier in a London churchyard late in 1944, Alexander mused:

Having been brought up in close proximity to such ancient works of art and evidences of history, it is inescapable that the British should get the feeling that these things belong to them . . . We have no such monuments . . . unless you put Mount Vernon and Arlington in this category . . . we have no such deep roots in the past . . . If one understands this . . . it is much easier to understand . . . the slowness with which the British tend to adapt themselves to changes. They have a greater feeling for the accomplishments of the past and are not quite so enamored of the future as we are.³⁰

Alexander also noted a unity and patriotism to military life bred through diversity.³¹ Notwithstanding army segregation (officially ended in 1948), he believed 'that racial prejudice is not ingrained'.³² He didn't see much of black GIs, but did see the Second World War in racial terms: 'victors in this conflict realize that the day of the white man's domination of the world is over'. 'Are the white people such poor souls that they cannot hold their own against . . . other races without sitting upon them . . . ? I

have more race pride than to think so'.³³ When he met the Home Secretary in 1943, Herbert Morrison articulated anxieties about relations between GIs and hosts, but his 'major problem was that of clashes between white and negro members of the US armed forces'.³⁴

Alexander rarely reflected emotionally. He combined gregarious qualities with the ability not to give too much of himself away. His interior life was not so much private as preoccupied with others. The 'reaction of most of the fellows here' to VE Day was 'a sober one'.³⁵ It was 'funny not to have to be "sweating it out"', particularly for the British relieved of the 'physical presence of war, the galling restrictions on activity, the eternal danger lurking'. This relief was 'extraordinary, because . . . the British are undemonstrative . . . not addicted to public mass demonstrations in the way we are (a Sinatra craze here . . . is unthinkable.)'.³⁶ Alexander routinely applied words like 'tolerance' and 'sane' to Britons, and while Americans did not always 'get' the British, who were in turn ambivalent about the presence of the expeditionary forces, 'we get along here, amazingly well'.³⁷ Most GIs were sustained by a 'belief in return home', and Alexander was himself keen to resume his studies.³⁸

Social observer

Civilians exhibited the homing instinct. On a train to London, Alexander met returning evacuee children and noted that even residents of Dover had gone home. Britons 'don't like to move from their native habitat'. Train journeys were rich sustenance for his anthropological, mass observational propensities. Typically he found civilian as well as military occupants. 'Conversation will lag at first. Everyone . . . will pretend to be busy . . . cigarettes will be offered . . . weather, train times discussed . . . then . . . questions . . . what part of America he comes from . . . what part of the country he's been stationed . . . British and American ways of doing things'. It was not always cordial. On one trip, Alexander experienced 'the most definite anti-American feeling I've yet heard'. A woman taken for a 'commando' was 'bantered at by GIs' and retorted that 'there were too many here'. Reflecting, poignantly, on his methodological belief in conversation, for Alexander the 'rail car's peculiar mixture of familiarity and unfamiliarity' was like 'a book which one will never see again – that little bit of life is completed and though it can be brought back in memory, its actual threads are lost forever'.³⁹

Alexander recorded how he was 'surprised with the English countryside', its 'hedges . . . neatness' and 'historicity'. Children 'gasped at us', the food was 'pretty good' and citizens 'cordial'. He was, above all, 'struck

with the oldness of the country'. Within a fortnight he had acquainted himself with the nearest 'quaint' small town (Framlingham) and the early Tudor ceiling in its church.⁴⁰ In his first venture off base, he found in Great Yarmouth the 'narrowest streets I think I've ever seen with the possible exception of Venice'. Cambridge captivated him with the 'old buildings one finds in every city and town on this island'. 'We have very few houses in the entire US which are older than' 1640, he wrote, 'yet here it is by no means an exceptional house'. 'Everything is old here', even the 'little red post boxes', of which Framlingham had an 1856 example.⁴¹ Like many US visitors Alexander seemed fixated on Britain as an old country.⁴²

Alexander's first London trip in July 1943 packed in Madame Tussaud's, Trafalgar Square, Fleet Street, St Paul's, the changing of the guard and a glimpse of the Princess Royal. Tussaud's held an ineffable appeal, but offered discounted entry for the military and waxworks of fourteen US presidents, plus a future one in Eisenhower.⁴³ There was some more Alexander-level culture in performances of Shaw's *Arms and the Man* and Ibsen's *Master Builder*. His next London trip included the Royal Albert Hall to hear the BBC Symphony Orchestra and dinner with free French and Belgian forces at what would become a favourite haunt, one of several impromptu French eateries in South Kensington, most likely Chez Rose.⁴⁴ Alexander had money and time to spend on London's vibrant wartime cultural life.

Alexander was reconciled to his cultural mix. 'No matter how highbrow I may be about reading and other entertainments, I have just no sophistication . . . when it comes to movies'.⁴⁵ At a pantomime (a Vaudeville survivor, he surmised) he was impressed by Tessie O'Shea, a 'big, wholesome looking woman, full of pep, vim', whom he mis-identified as Irish. The prime minister and his wife and daughter were also there, and Alexander 'saw Churchill himself laugh heartily'.⁴⁶ But rest assured, reader, Alexander's reading in Britain included Zola's *Nana*, Kropotkin's *Mutual Aid*, Maurois on *Disraeli*, Drucker's *End of Economic Man*, Koestler's *Darkness at Noon*, Bronte, Mencken and Gunther.⁴⁷

Alexander's passion, besides politics, was cathedrals. 'Lovely', he wrote of Canterbury, along with a description of its exterior, interior, choir, screen, cloisters, tombs (imperial wars, the Black Prince) and Beckett's 'Corona' after a tour with the Canon. He found 'in a number of these towns', 'an air of a period about them'. Chester was medieval; York, Roman; Durham, border warfare; Winchester – which he toured with the verger – Anglo-Saxon. It was as if Alexander were describing an alien vision, alien to the US in any case, by dint of their age.⁴⁸ 'Ely . . . is, I think the most beautiful', but 'I still haven't seen anything to beat Durham'. York Minster was 'beautiful', but its setting less impressive.⁴⁹ As for cathedrals of learning, Oxford he

'liked . . . better than Cambridge'. He was 'lost to the twentieth century' in Christ Church's Cathedral-cum-Chapel, although he disliked its Victorian segments. He also noted Oxford memorials to German First World War dead as an 'amazing comment on the tolerance of the English'.⁵⁰

Alexander was not uncritical, finding Westminster Cathedral 'garish', like a mosque with Byzantine minarets.⁵¹ Lichfield's chief quality was that it had no building works; Birmingham's was 'strange'; Manchester's left him unmoved.⁵² Alexander's interest was grandeur—architectural not spiritual. He attempted to attend Geoffrey Fisher's anointment as Archbishop of Canterbury, but 'for once I found the British quite unbending, no ticket, no entry'. But the 'outlandish' military and millinery displays wowed him to believe that this 'ceremony dating back many centuries . . . must have been overwhelmingly impressive'.⁵³ 'Holyrood Palace was . . . a disappointment'; Stratford, too full of 'shakespeariana';⁵⁴ Blackpool had the 'crowds one sees at Coney Island or Atlantic City'. Liverpool was 'the most cosmopolitan city . . . large numbers of obviously foreign people' and 'chop suey joints'. Lancaster reminded him of Montmartre, with . . . 'a sacre coeurish building on the top of the highest hill'. Cardiff had the 'nicest civic centre in Britain . . . it reminds one of Washington'.⁵⁵

Alexander habitually compared British and American characteristics. Print media was healthy, despite paper recycling ('salvage') – 'if you'd see the toilet paper here, you'd know what I mean'. He admired Penguin's bargain pricing, 'Everyman's Library', Gollancz's Left Book Club which was like the US Book of the Month (and he noted the Right Book Club too). There were more bookstores than in the US, but public libraries were more poorly stocked.⁵⁶ 'With their attachment to things as they are', the British 'haven't gone in much for chain stores'. In Great Yarmouth, 'the retail establishments were of the regular British variety, Victorian, dark, and not too attractive'.⁵⁷ However, Lewis's in Manchester was 'as modern and up-to-date as any American emporium . . . like being back doing my Xmas shopping in Macy's'.⁵⁸

The House of Lords he found like the Supreme Court, all 'robes and wigs', 'and to an American, a bit ridiculous'.⁵⁹ At the Lancashire assizes in Lancaster Castle 'one of the solicitors (English for lawyer) was a woman and there was an element of humour in seeing a woman dolled up in 18th century men's garb'.⁶⁰ Alexander found himself ushered into the visitor's gallery of the Commons (convened in the Lords chamber, he later glimpsed the blitzed Commons) by non-serving uniformed Conservative MP (and ex-British Union of Fascists organiser) Jocelyn Lucas. He found the conduct 'pompous' and 'funny', but also 'more polite' (no spittoons, newspaper reading, back slapping) than in Congress.⁶¹

Radio news was different. That it was at set times on the BBC meant that 'when Mussolini fell it took an hour to announce it'. This struck Alexander as 'characteristic of the two nations. The Americans like a bustle and want their news hot'. Language and dialect were frequent barriers. There was 'more variation in the spoken language on this "tight little isle" than the whole of the US', he reckoned. Some vernacular rubbed off on Alexander. He noticed that he had started ordering the date 12 February rather than February 12. 'I was going to write "queuing up"', he admitted in 1945, but 'you wouldn't understand that'.⁶²

Alexander was conscious of happenstance, vignettes, a regular collocutor. At his usual London hotel in September 1943 he found the proprietor discussing the war with guests, shopkeepers and businessmen, or "'black-coated workers" as the English would have it', a term signalling Alexander's sociological nous. One 'rampant imperialist' told Alexander that America was 'a wonderful place for gadgets . . . and that's all'. A woman in the Auxiliary Territorial Service Alexander found 'more-or-less disillusioned'. 'In view of the liberal flow of liquor, someone must have an inside track on the black market'. But a liberal temper was maintained and 'it all went off with great aplomb in spite of the mixed company'.⁶³

He began to display a Mass Observer's eye for the micro-differences of class. Visiting *Observer* movie critic Caroline Lejeune in metroland Pinner, he compared it to Scarsdale and Englewood. Her house was 'modern (except for central heating – the English just won't have this)' – 'definitely upper middle class though', with books, alcohol, space and near a golf course. This was different from the 'professional middle class' surroundings of a family friend in Neasden, which he compared to Leonia.⁶⁴ Breakfasting in Sunderland he encountered two 'black-coated' (white-collar) clerks who 'illustrated . . . the English tendency towards caste . . . which is more emphatic here than in the states'. They apologised to Alexander not for the queue, but for it being a 'workingman's café', which Alexander found 'nice, clean . . . not at all déclassé'.⁶⁵

For Christmas 1943 Alexander requested Hershey's jelly and Nestlé candies, and he distributed thirty-six candy bars and two of three toothbrushes.⁶⁶ Kids would miss the GIs 'no matter what the British adults may think of the American soldiers . . . soldiers always did arouse the juvenile imagination'. And especially the 'kids who practically live here', largely for the airbase food.⁶⁷ At Christmas 1944, he 'couldn't help but feel a little guilty, knowing how hard it is for Britishers to get a decent meal',⁶⁸ something he was partial to. In a London Indian restaurant, 'gentlemen with dark skins went around with towels wrapped around their heads – for all I know none of them may have been Indians'. Amidst 'exotic interior

decorations', Alexander consumed 'positively the hottest thing I have tasted . . . they should have served fans . . . with it'.⁶⁹

Political observer

One can read Alexander as having a box seat in the final chapter, 'London, 1942', of Rodgers's *Atlantic Crossings*: preoccupied with the war's geopolitical portents and conscious of Britain's uncertain edging towards a full-blown welfare state, of growing American global power, of the politics of race and end of empire. He was a 'North Atlantic progressive connection' in practice and even by family background (which he researched in the 1970s), as he was related to A.V. Alexander, the Co-operative politician and Attlee's Defence minister. And he was also part of the progressive North Atlantic's 'unravelling', as his anti-Communist Cold War trade union politics took him to Latin America.⁷⁰

In August 1943 the Churchill Club opened in Westminster Abbey's Dean's Yard, in seventeenth-century Ashburnham House, part of Westminster School. The Club occupied the ground floor, in part to disguise the RAF communications station above. It became Alexander's London base – 'I don't know what I'd have done without it' – a club for US (chiefly) and Commonwealth military personnel with a degree, serving food and hosting talks – Alexander was member 355.⁷¹

In November 1943 he saw the author discuss the *Beveridge Report*. Beveridge was 'sanguine' about its prospects, suggesting that 'public pressure would force its passage'. The Club was no liberal sanctuary. A month later Alexander was pigeon-holed by a Wren who contended that 'Eastern peoples . . . need to be looked after' and that Anglo-Indian bonds were 'spiritual and the Bengal famine evidence of the risks of self-rule'.⁷² Other Churchill Club speakers Alexander heard included Geoffrey Crowther of *The Economist*, Cambridge political scientist Denis William Brogan and Oxford imperial economic historian Keith Hancock.⁷³ In 1944 Commonwealth MP Vernon Bartlett, Labour's Jennie Lee and the *Sunday Express*'s John Gordon discussed the options for post-war Germany. Alexander interjected against Gordon's irredentism in favour of a democratic Germany. Lee thanked him and asked him to contact her at the Labour party conference.⁷⁴ Nor were Club talks only political. In 1944 Alexander sat on the floor to listen to Vaughan Williams, William Walton and Malcolm Sargent in a 'Musical brains Trust' – quite anti-American, he felt, sparing in praise for Gershwin and 'not too sympathetic to jazz'.⁷⁵

Alexander had catholic political interests, but the left was his native milieu. Armed with his letter from Daniel Bell, at the London Labour Party

HQ Alexander met Donald Daines, LCC member for Kensington North and acting secretary of the London Party. Daines introduced Alexander to LCC leader Lord Latham, General Secretary Jim Middleton and, in August 1943, the Home Secretary. Their meeting was 'not prolonged', but Herbert Morrison impressed Alexander.⁷⁶ 'If there is ever a Labour government formed, chances are that Herby will be the guy to lead it . . . one of the few with really vigorous ideas'. He also admired Aneurin Bevan, whom he met at the *Tribune* offices in November 1943. The 'stormy petrel of English politics', Alexander found 'charming', if 'nervous . . . for during our conversation he . . . paced backwards and forwards'. Morrison wanted the coalition government to continue. Bevan advocated a free vote on leaving the coalition for Labour MPs, increasing their leverage on reforms in the meantime.⁷⁷

With a letter this time from 'my friend' Bevan, Alexander met Archie Lush (Bevan's agent) in Tredegar. Tredegar 'did not look as run down as I had expected', its 'houses . . . neat and clean'. Lush reckoned 'a good Communist candidate like Pollitt would pull about 10,000' votes, but Alexander sensed that 'Bevan is the Labor Party in this area'.⁷⁸ 'To learn more about the politics of the Midlands', Alexander 'hunted up the office of the Manchester Labour party. There was no one there'. Instead he met Trades Council Secretary Jack Munro, and his soon-to-be-successor, Horace Newbold. Both were ex-Communist trade union bureaucrats, sustaining the organisation by the book. 'I played a little dumber on things than I actually was', Alexander admitted, 'to get their straight reactions', having thus far encountered the Morrison and Bevan view.⁷⁹

In Edinburgh, this time furnished with a letter from Daines, Alexander met John Taylor, Secretary of Labour's Scottish Council, who was caustic about Scottish nationalists as 'sentimentalists . . . the "Scots wha hae" variety'. In Glasgow he met the Scottish Independent Labour Party's (ILP) Secretary and Chair, Dan Carridice and David Gibson. The ILP took him 'back to the days when I worked in the SPUSA and the YPSL', although in Gibson he felt 'there was no trace left of the idea of the "dictatorship of the proletariat."' In London, he tracked down the widely admired Secretary of State for Scotland, Tom Johnston. Johnston believed a Scottish parliament would happen and was focused on bringing hydroelectric power to the Highlands.⁸⁰ Intrigued by Scottish nationalism and just after Robert McIntyre's 1945 Motherwell by-election victory, Alexander met with the SNP's first MP and future leader. Alexander found McIntyre 'mild-mannered'. He wanted full independence, tariffs and argued once the SNP had a majority of Scottish MPs, they would secede and declare themselves the Scottish parliament.⁸¹

Meeting Air Minister John Strachey, Alexander observed: 'once you are tarred with the brush' of extremism, as Strachey was, 'it's the devil's own

time shaking it off'.⁸² In 1945 via an alley in Covent Garden Market he entered the 'not exactly spacious, but . . . ample' office of Communist Party leader Harry Pollitt. Beneath portraits of Lenin, Stalin, Voroshilov, Tomoshenko and Pollitt himself he asked about his dismissal as leader in 1939 and heard him dismiss the ILP and Common Wealth, but support Scottish Home Rule. Alexander was 'impressed with how typical an Englishman Pollitt seemed to be in everything except his political ideas'. More sarcastically, he noted Pollitt's 'rather sloppy clothes, not unexpected in a Communist secretary'.⁸³

The Fabian Colonial and International Bureaus were regular ports of call for Alexander. The Colonial Bureau's secretary Rita Hinden connected him with the West African Students Union (WASU) at Africa House in Camden. The WASU had been a vanguard of anti-colonial activity in London since the 1920s. Alexander was impressed by their ambitions, organisation and educated debate: 'had it not been for the accents . . . I could easily have conceived of myself as talking to a group of American negro students – their talk and reactions were so much the same'. He noted that male students dominated political debate. Women at WASU tended to be in charge of music, food and dancing, not that such sociability was insignificant. 'I'd never thought of there being any educated and politically advanced West Africans', expressed Alexander, candidly unpacking his own baggage. But he had not entirely shed it. 'There is nothing of the primitive or the voo-doo about them' he felt; they were 'westerners to the enth degree'.⁸⁴

KamKan Boadu was Alexander's closest WASU contact. Boadu was a delegate at the 5th Pan-African Congress in Manchester in October 1945. He also met Joe Appiah who was training as a lawyer and later married Stafford Cripps's daughter, and Bankole Akpata, a member of the West African National Secretariat set up by Kwame Nkrumah after the 5th Congress.⁸⁵ Convinced that 'prejudices are not iron-clad', Alexander took his Southern friend 'Tiny' ('a Mississippi farm boy') to WASU to 'soften his traditional prejudices on the race question'.⁸⁶

In 1943 Alexander took Boadu to the Churchill Club, when Colonial Minister Oliver Stanley was speaking. In Alexander's opinion, Stanley was 'interested in the welfare of the colonies and . . . a pretty good Colonial Minister'. Boadu was the 'first negro ever to grace the halls', which 'caused a mild stir', hinting racism might have sources other than the GIs.⁸⁷ In 1945, with Boadu and Appiah, he attended 'Race and the Color Bar' organised by the Missionary Societies. The new Archbishop of Canterbury seemed to Alexander to defend racial pay differentials because 'natives' did not understand money. The cathedral was more to Alexander's tastes than the Archbishop. 'Tory MP' David Gammans,

whose pre-parliamentary career was in the Malayan Colonial Service, 'denied entirely that there was any exploitation of the colonies by the British'. 'Self-governing colonies', Alexander understood Gammans to be suggesting, were 'baloney' whose problems would not be resolved by writing constitutions. Alexander 'didn't know that such people really existed anymore'. Arthur Creech Jones, Chair of the Fabian Colonial Bureau and Colonial Secretary under Attlee, emphasised the 'economic and social development of these colonies'. Though, Alexander felt, they still 'did not lay enough stress . . . upon self-government'.⁸⁸

Alexander was a consummate radical cosmopolitan. He met George Padmore (pseudonym for Malcom Nurse), a mentor to the WASU activists. Born in Trinidad, Padmore became Head of the Negro bureau of the Red International of Labor Unions (Profintern), with a seat on the Comintern Executive. In London from 1934 he split with the Comintern over the popular front. His own mentor was London-based Trinidadian C.L.R. James, like him an ILP member. Alexander spotted Padmore (so much for the pseudonym) in a London bookstore in May 1944, checked his vision with the store staff and chased after him. British colonies were 'bitterly resentful at the treatment they and their countries are getting at the hands of the democracies', Padmore explained. 'If the white man wants to avoid the most cataclysmic wars in the world's history', Padmore told Alexander, 'he will have to admit the darker races to full equality'.⁸⁹

A month later Alexander headed to Cranleigh Street in Camden, where Padmore 'greeted me like a long-lost brother'. 'Mildly surprised' to meet Padmore's 'white wife', domestic partner Dorothy, what followed was six hours discussing empire and race, with Alexander defending Burnham's *Managerial Revolution*.⁹⁰ When they next met in April 1945, the relaxation of milk and sugar rationing chilled their political passions. Padmore suggested an ice cream at a Moo Cow Milk Bar. When Alexander went to the Churchill Club later that day he noted, 'they've just been allowed to make ice cream here again, such as it is'.⁹¹

London was full of governments in exile, social democrats, journalists, writers – grist to Alexander's networking and sociability. Chief among Alexander's contacts was journalist Friedrich Scheu, who reported for the *Daily Herald* (and others) from 1930s Vienna. Scheu left Austria in 1938 and founded the Anglo-Austrian society in 1944. He wrote an early account of the Beveridge Report.⁹² Scheu and Alexander dined in London regularly.⁹³ And through Scheu Alexander connected with exiled Viennese journalists Oscar Pollak and George Gedye. Pollak was editor of the Austrian social democrats' *Arbeiter Zeitung* (and again after the war) and *de facto* leader of London's Austrian socialists (living at Henry Brailsford's). Gedye was the *Daily Telegraph* and *New York Times*'s central Europe correspondent.⁹⁴

Another émigré and former *Arbeiter Zeitung* editor Alexander encountered was Julius Braunthal. Braunthal was an editor of the Left Book Club's *Left News* and of the *International Socialist Forum*, the journal of the Labour and Socialist International, the remnants of the 2nd International, dubbed the 2½ International. He told Alexander he had no intention of returning to Vienna after its anti-semitic traumas. Braunthal remained in the UK as the first Secretary General of the International and compiled a three-volume *History of the International*.⁹⁵

At Horham airbase, Alexander met Michael Karolyi, president of Hungary at the end of the First World War and president of the Free Hungary Council in Britain.⁹⁶ He sought out other relics. In October 1944 'for the heck of it', Alexander travelled to Criccieth (visiting the Castle as well) on the north-west Welsh coast, where Lloyd George had moved a month earlier. Alexander 'got the impression the populace thereabouts literally worships Lloyd George'. He 'talked for just a very few minutes' to the former PM. He 'no longer has the intellectual verve and keenness which were once his', Alexander recorded. Still, in a tribute to his own method, 'it'll make history mean a great deal more now'.⁹⁷

Alexander wangled his way into the main 1944/45 political conferences. At the 1944 Trades Union Congress meeting in Blackpool, in the press gallery, he noted (as he usually did) the layout of proceedings. On the stage seated behind two rows of tables were, among others, General Secretary Walter Citrine (who spent his time defending Bevin from militants) and A.K. Pillai from the Indian Federation of Labour. Alexander met other Indian delegates more interested in the upcoming World Trade Union Congress. Ellen Wilkinson gave the fraternal address. Wilkinson 'belongs to the non-trade union as opposed to the trade union section' of Labour and told Congress the party was not subject to its 'minute oversight'. They should not look at Labour as a 'poor relation' (although it was both). Alexander thought it a 'penetrating address . . . bearding the lion in his den'.⁹⁸

He witnessed a 'witty . . . brilliant speech' by Liberal chair Violet Bonham-Carter and deputy leader Percy Harris, who was 'caustic . . . about Brother Brown' (Ernest Brown, National Liberal leader). Debating the Beveridge Report, opened by its namesake, the deepfelt unease among delegates about state interference in private liberty impressed Alexander. He suspected that the case against ever-growing government bureaucracy 'is going to have some weight'. How harmonious Liberal debate was compared to Labour struck Alexander, and that 'the vast majority' of Liberal delegates 'were grey-haired', middle-class and female. Alexander found this 'surprising . . . since nothing discussed during this session was peculiarly of interest to women'.

The Liberals gifted him a ticket and Labour ‘let him in for love’, but Alexander had to tout a balcony ticket from a delegate to the Conservative conference. ‘I don’t know whether it is so real under the surface as it appears on top’ the sceptical GI observed, but there was ‘complete unanimity’ at the conference. A dozen resolutions were ‘unanimously’ passed, with ‘little for temper or temperatures to get roused about’ – other than a few Young Conservatives, notably Peter Thorneycroft, urging the party not to drift too right in its rallying call of ‘away with controls’. Attacks on bureaucracy, nationalisation, socialists, unions or co-ops ‘won loud applause’. Keynote speakers loomed larger than debate. Churchill congratulated his coalition partners, but insisted that ‘the nation was headed for perdition should the socialists win’. Deploying all the ‘old bogeys of financial instability’ from 1929 and ‘aliens’ from 1924, the prime minister dampened the prospects for any continuation of coalition. Still, Alexander was rapt – ‘Churchill’s oratory has twice the lasting effects of the more excited kind of speaker’.⁹⁹

Labour’s conference in December 1944 he found more strained. Debating post-war Germany revealed some of the Vansittartism that bothered Alexander. Will Lawther in particular delivered a ‘violent and rather ignorant speech’. The Greece debate was an ‘explosion’ and the party aired its differences with Beveridge. These all raised the difficulties of Labour remaining in coalition, but differing on policy. The ‘greeting given Aneurin Bevan was as tumultuous’ as Alexander could ‘imagine any English audience can get . . . he knows how to work up his audience’. Other speakers impressed him, notably Sukhsagar Datta from Bristol in the social security debate.¹⁰⁰

Alexander brought a social democratic outlook to Britain, but had it informed by his sojourn. His first post-war pamphlet (authored with long-standing Stalin critic David Shub, an introduction by Norman Angell and Attlee’s 1945 address to Congress) asked, *What Do You Know about British Labor?* His second, *Labour Movements in Latin America*, was published by the Fabian International Bureau and Gollancz in 1947.¹⁰¹

Conclusion

As an academic (he completed his PhD in 1950), Alexander’s distinctive method was honed as he schlepped around Britain. He meticulously filed records of meetings, talks, speeches and interviews; he networked, absorbed opinions, collated paraphernalia – a scholarly entrepôt by journalistic method. This was in-the-field research, a firsthand observer bordering on participant, relying on interests and prejudices as much as

any sample. It was knowing in inducing subjects. 'I'm not as naïve as these questions sound', he wrote after one 1943 interview, 'but I thought the questions might elicit interesting answers'. He took no notes during interviews but typed them up immediately.¹⁰² His approach was not without critics. Iber sees Alexander's writing as a political intervention as much as a scholarly one. Alexander admitted to the charge of little interest in archives.¹⁰³ He was his own archive¹⁰⁴ – one from which historians can derive insights into both wartime Britain and the social-science mind(s) surveying it.

Alexander became entangled in progressive anti-communism during the Cold War, spending long stretches in South America, such as in Bolivia in 1957 and Chile with the Agency for International Development in 1968.¹⁰⁵ He undertook six trips in the 1950s for the American Federation of Labour's Free Trade Union Committee (FTUC). Founded in 1936 by Jay Lovestone, the FTUC reported to the CIA by then. Alexander alleged he 'hadn't known . . . that money for his trips in the 1950s came from the CIA', but it 'wouldn't have bothered him if he had'.¹⁰⁶ He returned to the SPUSA national executive from 1957 to 1966. Alexander returned to the UK six times up until 1991, mainly for research, occasionally to reminisce. By the 1990s, other Americans, including those in 'grungy London universities', were reporting back to left US magazines on journalism, New Labour and Americanisation.¹⁰⁷

Notes

*Thanks to John D. French for alerting me to Alexander's archive and Fernanda Perrone for archival guidance.

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6. D. Reynolds, *Rich Relations: The American Occupation of Britain, 1942–1945* (London: Random House, 1995), p. 248.
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18. 27 June, 21 July 1943.
19. 21 March, 22 October, 5 April 1943, 4 June 1942.
20. 25 March 1945.
21. 10 September 1944.
22. 5 April, 10 November 1943.
23. 14 February 1944.
24. 10 November 1943; Longmate, *The GIs*, pp. 232–3.
25. 18 August 1943.
26. K. Kowol, *Blue Jerusalem: British Conservatism, Winston Churchill and the Second World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2024); E. Wertheimer, *Portrait of the Labour Party* (London: GP Putnam, 1929); J. Retellack, *German Social Democracy Through British Eyes* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2022).
27. 16 and 22 June, 15 August, 4 November 1943 (YEV, iii).
28. R.J. Alexander, ‘The Problem of Xenophobia’ (n.d.) with letter of 6 January 1945.
29. 12 November 1944 (YEV, 338).
30. 3 November 1944.
31. 13 July 1942.
32. 3 November 1944.
33. 6 January 1943, 29 May 1945.
34. 4 August 1943.
35. 8 May 1945 (YEV, 488).
36. 21 May 1945.
37. 14 February 1944.
38. 9 August 1943 (YEV, 42).
39. 18 August 1943; 27 December 1944 (YEV, 380).
40. 14, 18 and 27 May 1943. St Michael the Archangel’s church.

41. 16 and 27 June, 4 September (to grandfather) 1943.
42. P. Mandler, 'How Modern Is It?', *Journal of British Studies*, 42.2 (2003), pp. 271–82.
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44. 21 July 1943. D. Kelly, 'Mapping Free French London: Places, Spaces, Traces', in D. Kelly and M. Cornick (eds.), *A History of the French in London* (London: Institute for Historical Research, 2013), pp. 300–301, 326–7.
45. 21 April 1945.
46. 2 February 1944.
47. 13 April, 27 May, 22 July, 21 October, 7 December, 26 August 1943.
48. 4 November 1943; 14 January 1945.
49. 31 May 1945; 3 November 1944 (YEV, 310), 2 February 1944 (YEV, 176).
50. 6 January 1945. He did not specify whether it was the Rhodes House or New College memorial.
51. 1 January 1944.
52. 13 April 1945, 12 September 1944.
53. 21 April 1945.
54. 2 February, 4 July 1944 (YEV, 250).
55. 10 and 20 September, 4 October, 3 November 1944.
56. 22 November 1943.
57. 27 May, 16 June 1943.
58. 10 December 1944.
59. c. March 1944 (YEV, 199).
60. 4 October 1944.
61. 21 October 1943, 3 November 1944.
62. 14 October, 8 June 1943; 12 February, 21 April 1945.
63. 19 September 1943.
64. 18 August 1943.
65. 2 February 1944.
66. 28 December 1943.
67. 18 April 1944.
68. 27 December 1944.
69. 11 January 1944 (YEV, 138).
70. D.T. Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1998), pp. 504–7, p. 504; Alexander, *Four Alexander Families*, p. 21.
71. c. March 1944; 19 September 1943 (YEV, 199).
72. 4 November, 3 December 1943.
73. 17 November 1943, 1 January 1944; 13 April 1945.
74. 3 November, 17 December 1944 (YEV, 365).
75. 22 February 1944.
76. 21 July, 4 and 18 August 1943.
77. 21 July, 17 November 1943.

78. 3 November 1944.
79. 1 October 1944.
80. 2 February, 18 May 1944 (YEV, 229–30).
81. 21 April 1945 (YEV, 472).
82. 21 July 1943.
83. n.d. (YEV, 451).
84. 4 November 1943; M. Matera, *Black London: The Imperial Metropolis and Decolonization in the Twentieth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015), pp. 101, 230.
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86. 11 January 1944 (YEV, 138), 7 December 1943.
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Chapter 7

Architecture and sociology: Oliver Cox and Mass Observation

Otto Saumarez Smith

Sociology and architecture were two areas of expertise that played a key role guiding the state's approach to working-class community in postwar Britain. It is unsurprising that they have been pivotal areas for historical research into the period; but this work has often been done in silos from each other. Peter Mandler's seminal essay 'New Towns for Old' has been my model for the placing of architectural production within its wider political, cultural and social contexts.¹ The following chapter presents a case study that gives an interwar origin for telling a history of architectural modernism in Britain alongside the growth of a sympathetic sociology into working-class communities. This history is potentially transformative because it is common to see the two professions of architecture and sociology as being at loggerheads, not least because modernist approaches to slum clearance have frequently been castigated by social scientists and historians for destroying close-knit working-class communities.²

The argument of the 1957 sociological study by Peter Willmott and Michael Young, *Family and Kinship in East London*, has been especially important for our understanding of the changes wrought on working-class communities in the postwar period. The book contrasted the tight-knit community of Bethnal Green with what it saw as the social disintegration of a new London County Council out-of-town estate in Greenleigh (in fact Debden, in Essex). There have been criticisms for its methodological weaknesses both on publication and since.³ Willmott himself would later recognise that much of the movement out to suburbs was spontaneous

rather than enforced – and that it reflected real aspirations.⁴ Nevertheless, it has been enormously influential and the book has been read as an attack on the architectural and planning orthodoxies of postwar slum clearance – even as a British equivalent to Jane Jacobs's anti-modernist broadside *Death and Life of Great American Cities*.⁵ This indeed was the way it was presented in Willmott and Young's new introduction to their book in 1986, where they characterised the book as a protest during a period of 'collective madness' and attacked 'clever architects'.⁶ This was disingenuous, as both Willmott and Young had close collaborative relationships with many in the architectural profession, not least the architect and housing specialist Oliver Cox.

Oliver Cox is in many ways representative of the modernist mainstream of his profession. Throughout his career, he was committed to an approach that eschewed excessive displays of personality, subsuming his work collaboratively, whether in the public sector of local or central government or in private practice. His aim, as he summed it up in 1978, was to 'design as if people mattered'.⁷ What this meant in practice was a commitment to try and understand through social scientific investigation what residents would want, and to design in accordance. He had a longstanding friendship and professional partnership with Peter Willmott, and cross currents of influence flowed between the two through their entire careers.⁸ During the 1950s they were both key members of the Kenilworth Group, which considered 'some of the problems of the town planner and architect and the contribution which the sociologist could make to town planning'.⁹ Willmott's 1963 study of *The Evolution of a Community: A Study of Dagenham after Forty Years* ends by explicitly deploying many of the arguments of the London County Council's Hook New Town project, which Cox had led.¹⁰ Cox attempted to hire the Institute of Community Studies while at the Ministry of Housing, and sociological thinking was at the root of projects Cox carried out in Oldham, Stevenage and West Ham.¹¹ The Institute of Community Studies collaborated extensively with Shankland Cox, the private architectural practice Oliver Cox set up with Graeme Shankland in 1965, culminating in the co-authorship of the Inner Area Study for Lambeth in 1977.¹²

This chapter provides a foundation for this later collaboration between architecture and sociology, by describing Cox's architectural training at the Architectural Association in the late 1930s, including an episode where he conducted two surveys of working-class streets in Fulham in collaboration with Mass Observation. Cox is interesting as a representative figure rather than as an outsider or a critic of architectural modernism. Through Cox we can begin to understand how elite architects conceived of, and interacted with, the working-class public whom they increasingly saw

as their clients.¹³ In an era when state provision was expanding and social citizenship was becoming more democratic, architects and experts attempted to mediate between top-down reforming projects with bottom-up demands for social changes and better standards of living. By focusing on this biographical episode it will be seen that Cox's interest in working-class communities developed not in opposition to other aspects of his education, but was a symbiotic part of an intellectual ferment that included radical politics and modernist aesthetics. Cox's student career accords with John Summerson's account of the changes that were happening among emerging architects in the late 1930s:

The first incentive was psychological – the novelty, strange beauty and allure of foreign architectural experiments. The exploration and mastery of these led to a wider conception of what architecture is, of its relation to siting, to town-planning, and thus to politics: then, from politics back to sociology and the sociological position of the architect himself.¹⁴

Oliver Cox was often in the shadow of his brother Anthony Cox (1915–93), also an architect, and one of the founding members of the firm Architects' Co-Partnership.¹⁵ Oliver's *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* entry is appended as a couple of paragraphs at the bottom of his brother's more detailed life story.¹⁶ Children of a senior civil servant, they were both educated at Mill Hill, and it seemed inevitable that Oliver would follow his brother to the Architectural Association (AA), having been practical and artistic at school. The familial encouragement brought Oliver into the slipstream of the modernist *avant garde*, and a milieu at the AA that was at once posh and bolshie.¹⁷ The AA student body was almost exclusively drawn from public school in these years, and was housed in Bedford Square: a location which had the atmosphere of a club as much as a school. Although the AA was in leftist political ferment, the students absorbed something of an older Liberal tradition of public service and didn't question that they would go on to form part of an elite.

Oliver was popular in the AA for his accordion playing, and a rendition of a song written by Anthony for him called 'Hermione and Jezebel' was long remembered.¹⁸ What exists of Cox's student work from the 1930s is suffused with a sense of enjoyment and his ease and stylishness of draughtsmanship. There is an AA bar co-designed with Anthony, for which Oliver was responsible for the colour scheme: 'The first thing to ask yourself about a colour scheme is: "Does it go with beer?" . . . it would have all the charm of a William Morris wallpaper with twice the kick.' He also produced a drawing in the style of Osbert Lancaster of a baroque church façade for Robert Furneaux Jordan, and a lovely cantilevered



Figure 7.1: Oliver Cox, Rural Plan, 1939. Architectural Association Archives.

band stand. A narrative drawing of a day to the country to conduct a ‘Rural Plan’ (Figure 7.1) is funny (fuelled by many pints of ‘very owd owd beer’).¹⁹ Cox would continue to produce comics to document his architectural process throughout his career, and they give unexpected comedy to studies of issues ranging from motorway bridges to the Inner City crisis.²⁰

Although Oliver joined the AA only after Tony had already graduated, Oliver’s glamorous elder brother continued to cast a long shadow across the institution in these years, with his mixture of modernist evangelism, student rebellion, public school confidence and far left politics. Tony had been the first student at the AA to embrace pure continental modernism, and his second-year project for a house in Norfolk has been described as being ‘without precedent’ for its continental modernity in Britain at the time.²¹ A group 1936 project for a new town (Figure 7.2), plonking down the Radiant City on a site near Faringdon in Berkshire (now Oxfordshire), was a remarkably bellicose piece of modernist *Épater la bourgeoisie*.

Tony was a leading figure in the student unrest at the school, termed by its protagonists a ‘revolution’, protesting against the Beaux Arts curriculum of the Head of School Harry Goodhart-Rendel (Figure 7.3).²² Tony wrote the 1937 AA Pantomime which called for Goodhart-Rendel’s resignation, and ended with a song that culminated in the ditty, ‘Here’s the reason for our recovery, we’ve made a great discovery, that Corbusier is

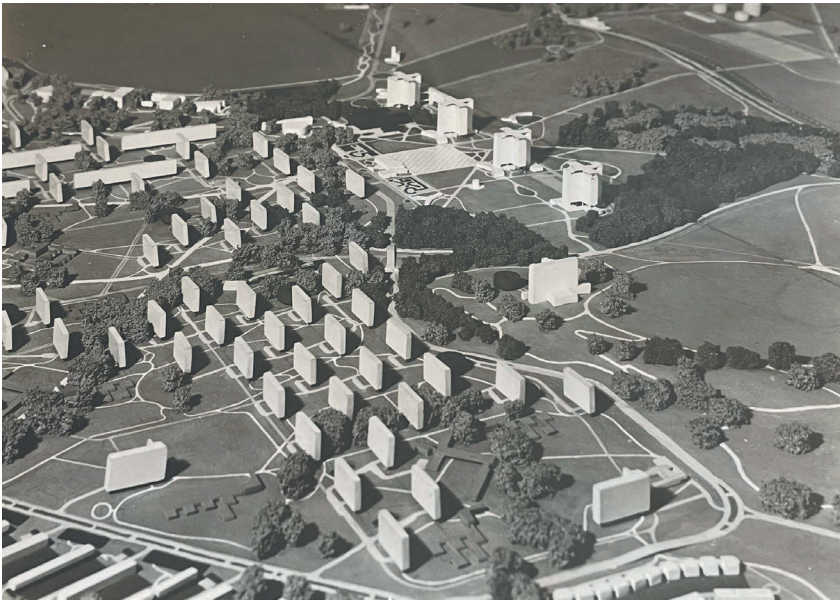


Figure 7.2: Anthony Cox and Unit 15, 'Plan for Faringdon, Berkshire', 1936.

the only way. Get a new master, get a new man. We are building a new community, men and women will live in unity, we can guarantee perfect liberty. Free Love, Free Plan!’²³

Tony was the founding co-editor of the short-lived, but significant student magazine *Focus*, which had its explosive first issue published in the year that Oliver arrived at the AA.²⁴ It was a potent mixture of student work and contributions from a distinguished international roster of architects. Le Corbusier was inveigled to write for the first issue – exhorting his student acolytes not to merely follow his style, but hectoring them, in his distinctive majuscule, that, ‘YOU ARE AN ORGANISER, NOT A DRAWING BOARD STYLIST’. It is perhaps ironic to note, considering Oliver’s later opposition towards the Corbusian wing of English architectural culture, that it was precisely this *organisational* rather than the *stylistic* element of architectural modernism that Oliver would be inspired by.

Oliver himself designed the chic ring-bound covers for *Focus*, and was complimented by the artist Ben Nicholson that the covers gave an exact flavour of the punchy contents. The journal opened with a radical salvo, which is worth repeating as it captures the fusion of leftist politics and modernist design electrifying the school at the time:

We were born in the war . . . We were born into a civilisation whose leaders, whose ideals, whose culture had failed. They are still in power to-day. But we, the generation who follow, cannot accept their

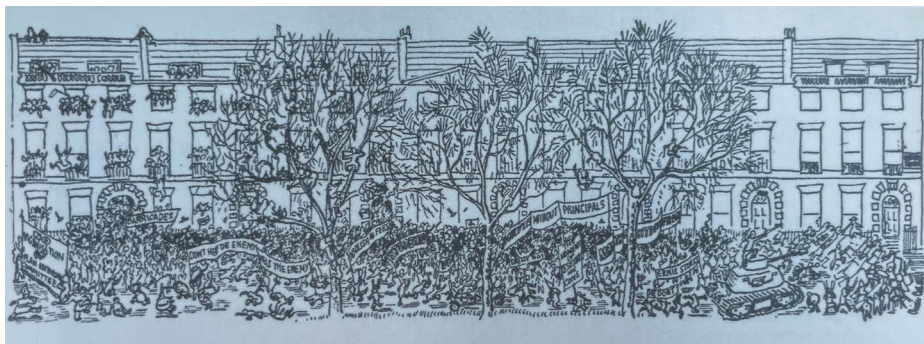


Figure 7.3: Oliver Cox's 1948 satirical drawing of the 'revolution' at Bedford Square. Plan 1, *Architectural Students Association Journal* (1948), p. 3.

domination. They lead us always deeper into reaction that we are convinced can only end in disaster. We have set out to produce a journal where we can develop our still chaotic ideas on the foundations of those built by certain older men (in age, not in spirit) who early in this century had realised contemporary problems.

Richard Llewellyn Davis (1912–81), whom Oliver remembered as another influence on him in these early years at the AA, had arrived as a student at the Architectural Association having completed a degree in engineering at Trinity College, Cambridge, where he had been an Apostle, and joined the Communist Party. Anthony later remembered him as being the catalyst for bringing the school into an orbit of left-wing ideas.

Richard was the catalyst, but no doubt most of us would have moved to the Left had he not been around, although it might have taken us a little longer. A strong groundswell in that direction became very apparent during our second year; Gollancz launched his successful Left Book Club that spring and soft-back volumes of quasi revolutionary literature were arriving monthly by post. Perhaps we did not read them very regularly or with the excitement with which we had already read Le Corbusier's 'Towards a New Architecture' (which I had bought the previous winter and soon followed with the 1929–34 volume of his 'Oeuvre Complete') but the social and political message of the literature of the Left and the technical and visual freshness of Modern Architecture combined to produce an effervescent mixture in whose heady vapours could be glimpsed a hazy image of the Promised Land.²⁵

There are conflicting accounts of whether Oliver followed his elder brother in *actually* joining the Communist Party in the 1930s.²⁶ I think not, but he was certainly close to many who *were* party members. Oliver will

have absorbed this mixture of politics and architecture, but a third, and arguably more lasting, cultural influence on him in the years leading up to the Second World War was Mass Observation – for whom he led two groups of students, in 1938 and 1939, to make surveys of Fulham.²⁷ The interest in Mass Observation aligns Cox with an intellectual and political current among the British left, which was shifting towards studying ‘everyday life’, and a belief that political action should be based on these insights.²⁸

In the summer before he started at the AA, Anthony took Oliver to the 1937 Paris World Fair, and they sought out Le Corbusier’s buildings, as well as Picasso’s *Guernica*, housed in the modernist Spanish Republican pavilion by the Catalan architectural collective GATEPAC, whose corporate approach to modernist design was also an influence on the brothers. It was a highly charged moment, and the stark horror of seeing the German Nazi pavilion stayed with Oliver. While on holiday with his brother in Paris, they had stumbled across two other AA students, Bruce Martin (1917–2015) and David Medd (1917–2009),²⁹ making measured drawings of the Petit Trianon, with the help of a Parisian fireman’s ladder.³⁰ Oliver remembered having a strong reaction:

this is not right, I felt I had a strong social conscience, I thought here we are, I was a public school chap, and had no contact with working class people, and here we are measuring up palaces for royalty, it would be far better to measure up a working class street in the middle of London.³¹

Oliver’s idea was relayed to Anthony’s friends, and Cox was introduced to another AA student, John Madge (1914–68), whose brother Charles had recently set up Mass Observation to conduct ethnographies of everyday life in England.³² It was however Tom Harrisson, the other founder of Mass Observation, who appears to have been the key figure guiding the students’ investigations – presumably as Charles Madge was by then in Bolton. Guided by advice and contacts from Harrisson, in the winter term of 1938 Cox led a team of four students³³ to make a survey of Strode Road, a terraced street of Victorian bye-law, tunnel-back houses (Figure 7.4).³⁴ The 1938 group wrote their work under the AA moniker Unit 4, but it does not appear to have been part of their official course, so was plausibly taken as part of their ‘vacation studies’.³⁵ Despite the group-work nature of the enterprise, Cox clearly was the leader, signing off other students’ work. Cox lived with a widow on the street, perhaps inspired by Harrisson’s recent experience of ‘going native’ among the working class in Bolton.³⁶ In the summer of 1939 a larger group of students, again led by Cox, returned to the area to make a fuller survey. Tom Harrisson again vetted the students’

questionnaires, and helped them with local contacts. The research was eventually fed into the Mass Observation 1943 book *An Enquiry into People's Homes*, where Fulham was fictionalised as Metrotown – although the students aren't officially acknowledged in this publication.³⁷ The students might nevertheless have been influential in shifting the focus of Mass Observation towards issues of housing, a major feature of its work in the war years and beyond.³⁸ Cox later said he was in touch at this time with the housing consultant Elizabeth Denby,³⁹ whose focus on 'rehousing from the slum dwellers point of view'⁴⁰ is the most obvious forerunner of the Fulham project. The Mass Observation Archive only holds the full archival working notes for the 1938 survey, as Cox reports that the architect-planner Max Lock had asked to see the drawings for the second survey, but he left them on a train.⁴¹ Nevertheless, the students produced a written statement detailing the second survey, *The Fulham Housing Survey 1939 Report*, which goes into more depth about their motivations and methodology (see Figure 7.4).⁴² In it they explain that the motivation to carry out the survey was due to seeing the nature of architectural practice shifting from private commissions towards mass housing by the public sector. As they put it, 'there was beginning a drift from private practice towards something bigger scale, and that where the culmination of an architectural education in the past had invariably been the design of private buildings for private patrons, we felt that this situation no longer held good.'⁴³

When he conducted the first Fulham survey of Strode Road Cox was still a teenager, an upper-middle-class architectural student, and his memory of the experience was one of culture shock: 'a traumatic experience suddenly to find myself confronted with people and surroundings and living conditions which were totally strange to me'.⁴⁴ One gets the sense the students must have been extremely intrusive.⁴⁵ His account in 1962 of his student forays into sociological observation, in conversation with Peter Willmott at an AA event linking sociologists and architects, were self-deprecatory:

It had begun as a student in the AA, and then, together with Tom Harrisson of Mass Observation, he had led a 'floundering band of students' into Fulham, where they did their measured drawings of a sordid little row of converted houses. They consisted of plans with complete furniture lay-outs and so on.⁴⁶

Floundering or not – and certainly the Fulham survey shared some of the amateurism and methodological eccentricities of Mass Observation when seen from the perspective of a later more professionalised sociology – Cox's time in Fulham is a fascinating precursor to his postwar

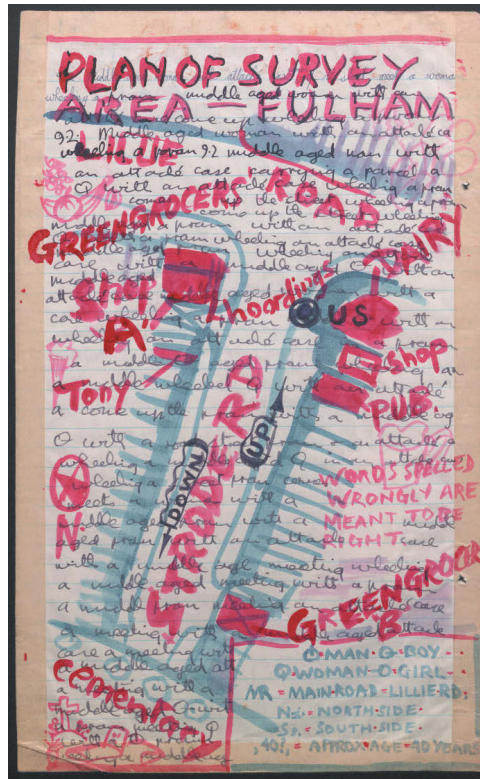


Figure 7.4: Fulham Survey cover, showing a map of Strode Road. Reproduced with permission of Curtis Brown Group Ltd, London on behalf of The Trustees of the Mass Observation Archive © The Trustees of the Mass Observation Archive.

work merging sociology and architecture. It places Cox right at the beginning of a new attitude towards the everyday lives of working-class communities, and how this appreciation would feed into wider housing questions.⁴⁷ A reported conversation with a resident Mr Morland, who asked ‘What are you doing this for?’ gives a sense of what the students were hoping to gain from such a survey, with more candour than in the final official report:

I then explained that we were architectural students, who were interested in working class housing: we wanted to find out how this class of people live, consequently we were trying to find out as much as possible about this street, and the people who live here. Mr M. then asked of what use such information could be. I further explained that the knowledge of the requirements of working class people would later prove very useful when it came to designing dwellings for the working class. Mr M. then said 'Well I've been in the building trade all my life, but I

don't see the use of measuring up these old homes.' I replied that our job could possibly [sic] carried out in working class homes: because it was the people we wanted to find out about, also the people's tastes and distastes: what kind of wallpaper they liked on their walls and so on. I said that it might be the case that we might never discover all the facts but the impression gained – however limited – was bound to be very valuable to us.⁴⁸

Alongside more standard methods of survey, including interviews, questionnaires, and Mass Observation 'day surveys', which record in minute-by-minute detail the life of the street, Cox and his team made architectural drawings. Careful dimensioned measured elevational drawings of an everyday Victorian terraced house (Figure 7.5) subverted the *beaux arts* activity of drawing an historic building like the Petit Trianon, by applying it to an architecture of the everyday – recording peeling paint and cracked cornices with the kind of focus traditionally placed on grand classical ornament.

The archival record of the 1938 survey contains a large quantity of undigested data.⁴⁹ It is nevertheless possible to track in the notes what the students are looking out for, and what they notice.⁵⁰ Doing so enables us to tie the students into an emerging current of thinking about working-class life. Jon Lawrence has used the archival material of 1960s social scientific data to make an argument of a shift occurring between earlier forms of social inquiry that were defined by the inequalities of power between the interviewed and the interviewer, stating that by the postwar period cross-cultural exchange was possible in these encounters.⁵¹ Despite its gaucheness, the Fulham survey is a notably early example of such a shift, with the students looking to document, and perhaps even valorise, ordinariness, much more than they are attempting to seek out problems.

Although the students were attentive to issues of overcrowding, damp and vermin, and are occasionally censorious about standards of housekeeping – the kinds of things that an earlier tradition of social enquiry might have been expected exclusively to notice – this is not their primary focus. In the cumulative visual evidence they accrue, they recorded evidence of working-class affluence and respectability as much as of poverty, and the mood of the files is largely celebratory of working-class culture and taste.⁵² The political background of the Munich crisis and the beginnings of Air Raid Protection measures often appears in the interviews, whether it was solicited or not, and Popular Front politics of the period may well help to account for some of the motivation behind the solicitude towards the working-class everyday.⁵³ The archive

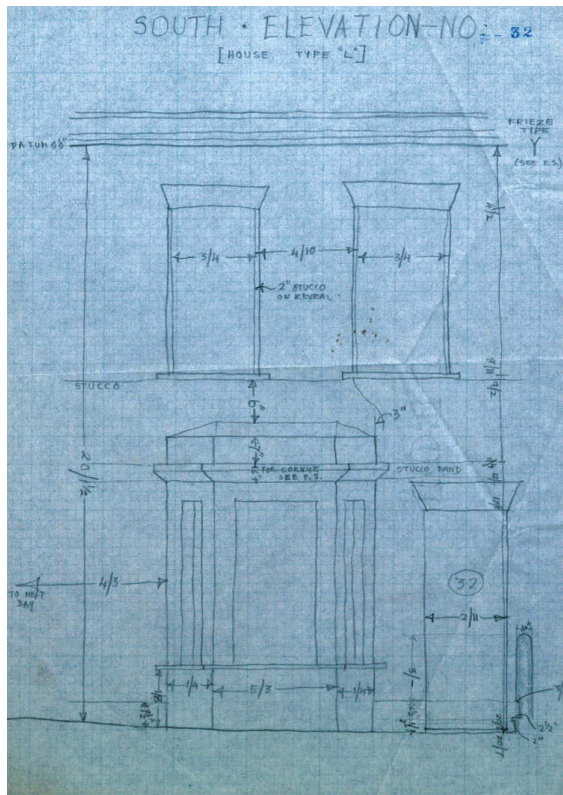


Figure 7.5: Strode Road Elevation in the Fulham Social Survey. Reproduced with permission of Curtis Brown Group Ltd, London on behalf of The Trustees of the Mass Observation Archive © The Trustees of the Mass Observation Archive.

includes human details, such as a family who aim to build on a plotland in Benfleet, and another whose deceased son had wanted to become an architect, which suggests that the students broke beyond the strictures of the social scientific interaction. Although the questionnaire has not survived, Question 7 was clearly intended to discover something about the neighbourliness and community of the street, an interest that it is more common to locate in postwar social surveys. Interestingly, inhabitants of Fulham nostalgically located a heterogeneous community and friendliness as something that had *already* declined.⁵⁴

The notebooks contain exhaustive inventories of home contents, with extensive ‘analysis of ornaments, furnishing, utensils etc.’. The contents of the houses give an impression of working-class respectability rather than Orwellian poverty.⁵⁵ While one might expect modernist upper-middle-class students brought up in a cultural atmosphere of ‘design reform’⁵⁶ to sneer at the overwhelming evidence of lingering Victoriana

in the 1930s home, including chintz curtains and patterned wallpapers, that they were confronted with, these are instead recorded and drawn with respectful precision (see [Figures 7.6](#) and [7.7](#)). They seem particularly interested in the various mantelpiece knick-knacks, not least the Staffordshire figurines, which at this date were increasingly becoming fashionable among Modernists for their indication of a popular anonymous culture.⁵⁷ Mantelpieces were of particular interest to Mass Observation, as they varied ‘according to district and class . . . They show some quite unexpected features, which concern class, religion, superstition, personal taste, and the whole life of the home’.⁵⁸ A full illustrated survey of the street’s doorknockers, however, notes disapprovingly that no. 17’s is ‘moderne’. The tone though is almost exclusively respectful.⁵⁹

Cox returned to Fulham in 1939 with a larger group of fourteen students, taken from various units across the AA.⁶⁰ Both the architectural historian Elizabeth Darling and the historian of Mass Observation James Hinton have written accounts of the importance of the first Fulham survey, but these accounts are limited as they miss this second much more extensive survey of Fulham.⁶¹ In 1939 the students surveyed two streets in what would now be called West Kensington: Fairholme Road, a grander terrace of 1880s Victorian three-storey houses which would have originally been built for upper-middle-class occupation, and nearby Hillmer Street, which has since disappeared through slum clearance. The streets were chosen as they displayed heavy incidence of multi-occupation.⁶²

The students rented a house as an office nearby, and while the majority of students came to Fulham on a day-to-day basis, five of them (including Oliver) stayed in the area for a week at a time. The survey was abandoned around halfway through due to the outbreak of war, which confused the results of the survey. Homes in the area were visited in groups of three or four students, and while one student obtained answers to the questionnaire, the others ‘went round the house noting down furniture, ornament and decoration’. The visits would last between an hour and two hours.

When writing up the findings the students felt that the questionnaire had been too loosely conceived, and accepted that its objective value was probably limited. A preserved copy of the questionnaire shows fifty-two separate questions, some of which could elicit quite extensive replies, asking residents everything from what their favourite chair was, to what fuel they used to cook their meals, as well as what they ate (a *lot* of bacon and eggs). The results only had a limited use in giving a suitably scientific account of the surveyed population – not least because the sample was smaller than hoped for (around thirty households) due to the outbreak of

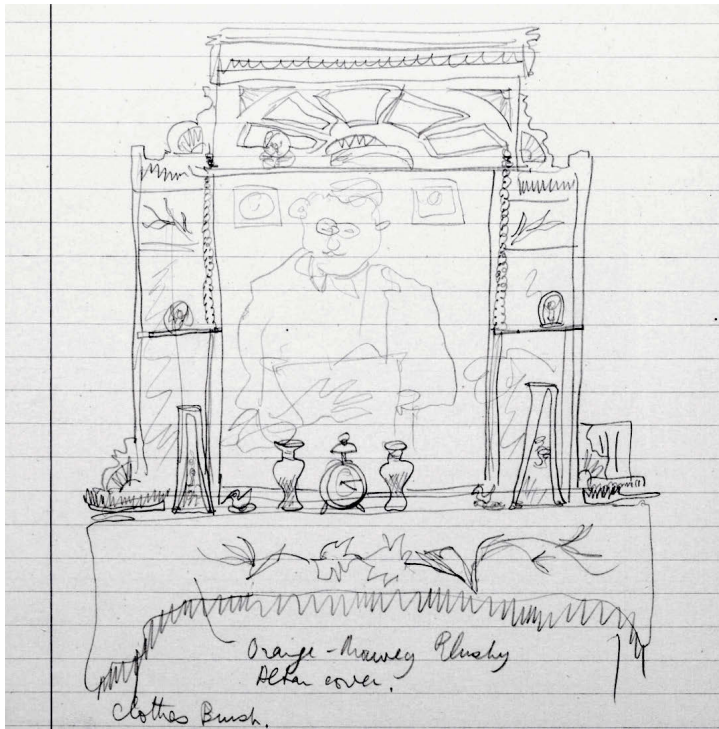


Figure 7.6: A mantelpiece in the Fulham Social Survey, with a self-portrait of Cox in the reflection. Reproduced with permission of Curtis Brown Group Ltd, London on behalf of The Trustees of the Mass Observation Archive © The Trustees of the Mass Observation Archive.

war. As with the 1938 survey, it gives a stronger sense of the student surveyor than the working class surveyed. Nevertheless, one thing that does come across clearly is how little sense of neighbourhood there was, and a question intended to elicit 'attitude to neighbourhood' brought forth a lot of complaints that it was rough, dirty and noisy, and had declined into a slum in living memory.

Unsurprisingly, the students were particularly interested in attitudes towards rehousing: whether the interviewee would like to stay in their present accommodation, be rehoused on a cottage estate or rehoused in a flat on the same site. The answers from this small survey are inconclusive. Four of the questions involved showing respondents a set of options, and asking them to comment whether they liked them or not: styles of wallpaper, paint colours, styles of furniture, and different building types (Figure 7.8). Perhaps the most interesting were an illustration of six different 1930s housing types. If the students were hoping for an endorsement of modernist aesthetics, this badly backfired as the

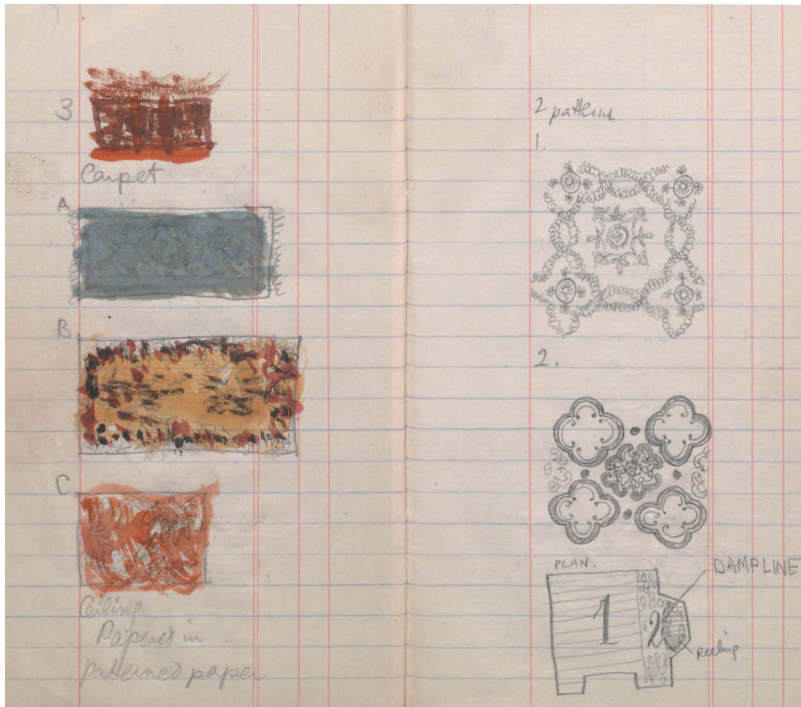


Figure 7.7: Notes on patterns in the Fulham Social Survey. Reproduced with permission of Curtis Brown Group Ltd, London on behalf of The Trustees of the Mass Observation Archive © The Trustees of the Mass Observation Archive.

Fulham residents were blandly polite about the two celebrated modernist blocks of flats included, Highpoint I and Kensal House ('no pets allowed I expect') – but were overwhelmingly positive about the example of semi-detached, mock-Tudor suburbia, then much loathed by the architectural establishment.⁶³

It would be easy to criticise the methodology of the students; indeed they were extremely self-critical in the written-up report, stating that their questions had been curtailed by 'the lack of imagination and previous experience of the people who drew it up'. In the attached notes on their conversations one can see something of the different strategies of residents in facing the students. Some were very candid about their life and problems: one talked about their son who had died from a venereal disease contracted from his new wife, another suffered from shell shock, while another woman told the students about a recent nightmare with a dead body in the bath. Others were defensive about their homes, perhaps

conflating the intrusive visit with that of a sanitary inspector ('I'm not ashamed for anyone to see my rooms – they're clean; the district nurse will tell you I'm spotless' – as one woman put it.) One resident seems to have comprehended what the students were looking for and gave very detailed descriptions of what they would like from a new house, down to describing what cupboards they would need in a kitchen.

By the architects' own account, the value of the experience had only been 'subjective':

We were able to take from Fulham the memory of a hundred and one everyday actions that were unfamiliar to our living routine, and it is these that now act as a powerful stimulant towards our finding practical, and above all, acceptable solutions when we now consider the problems of people of their class.

There is much in the archive that speaks of difficulties in comprehension between the upper-middle-class students and the working-class inhabitants they were surveying. The main impression of working-class culture in the period is that the residents of Fulham were extraordinarily patient and generous in allowing themselves to be surveyed so intrusively.

It risks being ridiculous putting too much intellectual weight on the Fulham survey, which was carried out by teenagers out of their depth in a cross-cultural encounter with working-class subjects whom they were honest enough to admit they found deeply foreign. The archival material they gathered is far more revealing of the surveyors than the surveyed. Nonetheless, it is notable that the students didn't fall back on dehumanising, snobbish, censorious, or paternalistic interpretations of what they were looking at – attitudes which were rife in the culture at the time, especially around issues of working-class taste.⁶⁴ Their aims, if not their methods, were laudable, and were stirringly summed up in the final report:

This was our conception of the duty of an architect (of our class) to the working class. He [*sic*] must be democratic in his work, that is to say he must not force a personal, synthetic conception of living on his clients, through the medium of a building ill-adapted to their present living routine. On the other hand he must improve on present conditions. It is thus his duty to know what it is that controls their happiness, where they are fundamentally different from him, and how he can get an understanding of them sufficient for him to be able to see things from their angle.

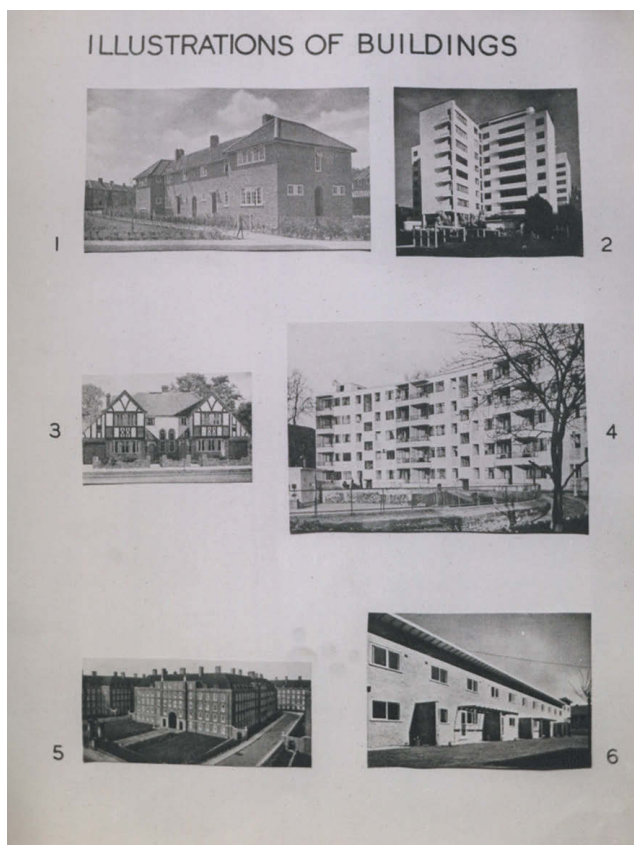


Figure 7.8: Illustrations of Buildings questionnaire in the Fulham Social Survey. Reproduced with permission of Curtis Brown Group Ltd, London on behalf of The Trustees of the Mass Observation Archive © The Trustees of the Mass Observation Archive.

Cox was prophetic when he identified the changes that would happen to the architectural profession in the coming decades, especially when it came to his own future career. Modernist architecture and progressive politics pointed towards a new role for the architect in society, and Mass Observation seemed to offer a way to understand what working-class residents needed. The failures of Cox's team to adumbrate any useful data from the mass of impressions and conflicting viewpoints was in many ways shared on a larger scale by Mass Observation as a whole, whose publication *An Enquiry into People's Homes* disarmingly opened with the admission that:

Anyone who has ever tried to consider what housing policy should be followed after the war will have been perplexed and puzzled by the

variety of contradictory opinions and desires expressed. People demand so many and such different things from their homes that it seems almost impossible to satisfy all needs and wants.⁶⁵

The need for a new architecture to be based on a sociology of everyday life was obvious to Cox from a young age, but how this would be achieved in practice was not so straightforward.

Although a large number had moved by this date, six residents of Hillmer Street, by then badly bombed, were reinterviewed by Celia Fremlin in 1941, again for Mass Observation. Fremlin wanted to know about the changes of diet since the outbreak of war.⁶⁶ Mrs Wilson remembered the experience of being interviewed in 1938 with self-deprecatory humour:

I remember when the gentleman called, I remember now, they said to me: 'What did you have for breakfast' and I said 'Sausages' and they said 'What did you have for dinner' and I said 'Sausages' and when they asked me 'What did you have for tea?' I didn't dare say sausages again, though tell you the honest truth, that's what we did have. I couldn't help laughing.⁶⁷

Conclusion

The ambition to understand the lives of the working-class inhabitants of housing was a recurring theme throughout Oliver Cox's career. As he summed up his design method:

Personal eyeball to eyeball contact between designer and residents is the first essential. This can lead to an understanding of what they are likely to enjoy, what dampens their spirits and what is likely to release in them that creative response which leads to care and love long after the designing is all over.⁶⁸

Intriguingly, the method of combining architectural analysis with sociological survey that he experimented with in Fulham closely parallels the system that Cox would develop in the 1960s to understand post-occupancy of new housing. The method was described in a survey of the Childwall Valley Estate in Liverpool, conducted by Shankland Cox with the Institute for Community Studies:

A sociologist and an architect worked together, the sociologist conducting the interview while the architect made a sketch of the dwellings, observing the position of furniture and equipment. In this way skilled observation played as important a part in the survey and

its interpretation as the opinions of the tenants. In addition to this the tenants were asked to keep a diary (a weekday and a Saturday and Sunday) from which we could see where and when the children played, which rooms were used at different times, and so on.⁶⁹

Cox's project in Fulham is historically significant beyond the foundation it provided for his later career. Through it we can see his modernist training, far from being antithetical to a sociological approach, grew in symbiosis with such a set of concerns. It suggests that it would be possible to rewrite the history of sociology and architecture in tandem. Returning to the original sociological source material that was produced collaboratively by architects and sociologists, even if it gives only a fragmentary picture of the working-class homes surveyed, is potentially transformative of our accounts of the motivations behind Britain's modernist housing drive, from its inception on.

Notes

1. Peter Mandler, 'New Towns for Old: The Fate of the Town Centre', in B. Conekin, F. Mort and C. Waters (eds.), *Moments of Modernity: Reconstructing Britain 1945–1964* (London and New York, 1999), pp. 208–27.
2. For example, this is a major theme in David Kynaston, *Modernity Britain: 1957–1962* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2015).
3. Jennifer Platt, *Social Research in Bethnal Green: An Evaluation of the Work of the Institute of Community Studies* (London: Macmillan, 1971); Jon Lawrence, "'Inventing the Traditional Working Class": A Re-analysis of the Interview Notes from Young and Willmott's Family and Kinship in East London', *The Historical Journal*, 59.2 (2016), pp. 567–93.
4. Peter Willmott, *Whatever's Happening to London? An Analysis of Changes in Population Structure and Their Effects on Community Life* (London: London Council of Social Service, 1975), p. 5.
5. Christopher Klemek, *The Transatlantic Collapse of Urban Renewal: Postwar Urbanism from New York to Berlin* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).
6. Peter Willmott and Michael Young, *Family and Kinship in East London* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986), p. xx.
7. Stephen Gardiner and Oliver Cox, 'Housing at Hillingdon, London. Architects: Shankland Cox Partnership, *Architectural Review*, 164.980 (1978), pp. 247–58. The reference is to E.F. Schumacher's *Small Is Beautiful*.
8. Paul Cox, Oliver's son, tells me that the Coxes and the Willmotts holidayed together.
9. Letter from O.J. Cox to Cleeve Barr, 9.3.61, HLG 118/185. Resulting in, for example, Ministry of Housing and Local Government, *Living in a Slum: A Study of Oldham* (London: HMSO, 1970).
10. Peter Willmott, *The Evolution of a Community: Dagenham after Forty Years* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963).
11. Ministry of Housing and Local Government, *Family Houses at West Ham: An Account of the Project with an Appraisal* (London: HMSO, 1969).

12. Shankland Cox and Peter Willmott, *Inner London: Policies for Dispersal and Balance* (London: HMSO, 1977).
13. Neal Shasore, *Designs on Democracy, Architecture and the Public in Interwar London* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022).
14. John Summerson, 'Bread and Butter Architecture', *Horizon*, 34.4 (1942), pp. 233-43.
15. Alan Powers, 'Architects Co-Partnership: Private Practice for Public Service', in C. Breward, F. Fisher and G. Wood (eds.), *British Design: Tradition and Modernity after 1948* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), pp. 113-26.
16. Powers, 'Architects Co-Partnership'.
17. Elizabeth Darling, *Re-forming Britain: Narratives of Modernity before Reconstruction* (London: Routledge, 2007), pp. 179-209 is the best account of the importance of the Architectural Association in these years.
18. 'Hermione was a maiden dame, I can't remember her maiden name, her hair was black and her skin was white, and king's would say she was a bit of alright.'
19. Summer 1939, AA/02/02/01/02/06.
20. Shankland Cox and Associates, *Motorways in Cities: Report on a Study Tour in Italy and Germany* (London: Shankland Cox, n.d.).
21. Patrick Zamariàn, *The Architectural Association in the Post War Years* (London: Lund Humphries, 2020), p. 19.
22. Andrew Saint, *Towards a Social Architecture: The Role of School-Building in Post-War England* (London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), pp. 3-4.
23. For Oliver's rendition of the song, aged 88, see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NqwU6AhFziI&t=2788s>. Accessed 12 March 2025.
24. On *Focus*, see Elizabeth Darling, 'Focus: A Little Magazine and Architectural Modernism in 1930s Britain', *Journal of Modern Periodical Studies*, 3.1 (2012), pp. 39-63.
25. Anthony Cox archive (uncatalogued, RIBA Drawings), CoAN/1-9.
26. Nicholas Merthyr Day, 'The Role of the Architect in Post-war State Housing: A Case Study of the Housing Work of the London County Council, 1919-1956', PhD thesis, University of Warwick (1988), p. 292, asserts that he was a party member. He may even have joined as a schoolboy, as he was friends with J.M. Bunting who edited the Communist public school magazine *Portent* (1934-5), which published lino-cuts by Anthony Cox.
27. Alexander Campsie, 'Mass-Observation, Left Intellectuals and the Politics of Everyday Life', *English Historical Review*, 131.548 (2016), pp. 92-121.
28. Campsie, 'Mass-Observation, Left Intellectuals', pp. 92-121.
29. David Medd was also introduced to Mass Observation by John Madge. He was a committed Mass Observer and is Diarist 5147, Respondent 1213 and wrote Day Survey 408.
30. Bruce Martin Interviewed by Andrew Saint, 18 March 2001.
31. Oliver Cox, *National Architects Lives* (1 of 14).
32. John Madge's later career in social research was a significant bridge between the worlds of architecture and sociology. 'Obituary: John Madge (1914-1968)', *Sociology*, 3.1 (1969), p. 110. His *RIBA* obituary posits that he was the first person in the country to combine architectural and sociological training.
33. Brian Field, David Goldhill, Thomas Grimm, and (the future theatre director) Gervase Farjeon.

34. The street is, mostly, still there.
35. Edward Bottoms, archivist of the Architectural Association, has helped me with the registers, which show that Cox's Unit 4 project was on a 'Baroque church' with Robert Furneaux Jordan. Cox's drawing for this in the style of Osbert Lancaster is in the RIBA collections. The *AA Prospectus 1937–8* encouraged the students to use the vacations to supplement their studies with sketching, measuring and research. There is no mention of the survey in either *Focus* or *The Architectural Association Journal*.
36. Judith M. Heimann, *The Most Offending Soul Alive: Tom Harrison and His Remarkable Life* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1999), pp. 124–5.
37. Mass Observation, *An Enquiry into People's Homes: A Report Prepared by Mass Observation for the Advertising Service Guild* (London: J. Murray, 1943).
38. Claire Langhamer, 'The Meanings of Home in Postwar Britain', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 40.2 (2005), pp. 341–62.
39. Andrew Saint interview with Oliver and Jean Cox, 6 October and 3 November 1995, in RIBA Biographical file.
40. Elizabeth Denby, 'Rehousing from the Slum Dwellers Point of View', *RIBA J* (21 November 1936), p. 61.
41. Andrew Saint; the Survey mentions both drawings and a dossier for each family.
42. Elizabeth Darling and James Hinton have both written accounts of the importance of the Strobe Road survey, but they only discuss the first 1938 survey. Elizabeth Darling, *Re-forming Britain: Narratives of Modernity before Reconstruction* (London: Routledge, 2007), pp. 199–203. James Hinton, *The Mass Observers: A History, 1937–1949* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 99–100.
43. Compare this with the argument made in 'Sociology and Architecture: Problems of Co-operation', *RIBA J* (August 1946), p. 433.
44. Peter Willmott and Edmund Cooney, 'The Architect and the Sociologist: A Problem of Collaboration', *AA Journal* (February 1962), pp. 172–86.
45. See Rebecca Goldsmith, 'Mass Observation and Vernacular Politics at the 1945 General Election', *Twentieth Century British History*, 34.4 (2023), pp. 703–25, for an account of how the 'classed and gendered' dynamics of the Mass Observation interview profoundly affected the social-scientific encounter.
46. Willmott and Cooney, 'The Architect and the Sociologist'.
47. See Neal Shasore, *Designs on Democracy: Architecture and the Public in Interwar Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), pp. 228–42.
48. Mass Observation Archive, 1-10-B, 'Survey of the Strobe Road Housing Stock Carried Out by Students at the Architectural Association: "Unit 4, Cox, Farjeon, Field, Goldhill, Grimm"'.
 49. Mass Observation Archive, 1-10-A-F, 'Survey of the Strobe Road Housing Stock Carried Out by Students at the Architectural Association: "Unit 4, Cox, Farjeon, Field, Goldhill, Grimm"'.
 50. Roslyn Dubler, 'The Sociologist and the Subject: Two Historiographies of Post-war Social Science', *Twentieth Century British History*, 33.3 (2022); Jon Lawrence, 'On Historians' Re-Use of Social-Science Archives', *Twentieth Century British History*, 33.3 (2022), pp. 432–44.
51. Jon Lawrence, 'Social-Science Encounters and the Negotiation of Difference in Early 1960s England', *History Workshop Journal*, 77.1 (Spring 2014), pp. 215–39.
52. The Strobe Road survey is therefore interesting in relation to arguments about interwar change made in Jon Lawrence, 'Class, "Affluence" and the Study of Everyday Life in Britain, c. 1930–64', *Cultural and Social History*, 10.2 (2013), pp. 273–99.

53. David Goldhill's diary.
54. For example, 'the tendency of Mr + Mrs. Wright is to keep aloof from newcomers to the street although relationships are kept up with the old circle of acquaintances, the feature of the street as it was in the past was its unity and friendliness – this feeling has apparently now declined'. In this the Fulham survey accords with the argument made in D. Baines and P. Johnson, 'In Search of the "Traditional" Working Class: Social Mobility and Occupational Continuity in Interwar London', *The Economic History Review*, 52 (1999), pp. 692–713.
55. Gordon B. Beadle, 'George Orwell's Literary Studies of Poverty in England', *Twentieth Century Literature*, 24.2 (1978), pp. 188–201.
56. Julian Holder, "'Design in Everyday Things': Promoting Modernism in Britain', in P. Greenhalgh (ed.), *Modernism in Design* (London: Reaktion Books, 1990), p. 123.
57. Sonia Solicari, 'From Cottage to Kitsch: The Enduring Appeal of the Staffordshire Figure', *The Journal of the Decorative Arts Society 1850 – the Present*, 35 (2011), pp. 134–47. Jessica Kelly, *No More Giants: J.M. Richards, Modernism and the Architectural Review* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2022), pp. 38–40.
58. Mass Observation, *Mass Observation: First Year's Work, 1937–1938* (London: L. Drummond, 1938).
59. Certainly in contrast to Tom Harrisson's later view on everyday interior design of the period, that 'the walls of England are plastered with the mediocre, indifferent and intellectually dead, in a ratio of approximately a hundred thousand to one against anything approaching a contemporary, thoughtful or lively vision'.
60. 'Fulham Housing Survey, 1939', Mass Observation Archive, 1-1-N Housing Studies. The students were, R.H. Adams, S. Babington Smith [Susan, later married to Oliver's brother Anthony], J.D. Broadbent, H.J. Ellern, B.P. Field, R.G. Forrester Walker, J.M. Lyon, E.C.C. Schneider, E.C. Smith, D. Stern, H.J. Stickings, G.L. Waddy, and J.H. Weeks. The fact that they were from separate AA cohorts suggests that this was not an official part of their studies.
61. Darling, *Re-forming Britain*, pp. 199–203; Hinton, *The Mass Observers*, pp. 99–100. Darling misattributes material from the second Fulham survey to the 1939 Unit 11 AA project for Ocean Street in Stepney, led by the architect-planner Max Lock, for which I have been unable to find more information than is stated in the paragraph description in 'A London Diary', *New Statesman and Nation*, 5 August (1939), p. 207, which was reprinted in *AA Journal*, August, 1939, along with a picture. Ocean Street is also mentioned in brief passing in Max Lock files 11.7. See also David Medd's reminiscences in his obituary, Max Lock (1909–1988), RIBA Biographical File.
62. Andrew Saint interview with Oliver and Jean Cox, 6 October and 3 November 1995, in RIBA Biographical file.
63. See Gavin Stamp, 'Neo-Tudor and Its Enemies', *Architectural History*, 49 (2006), pp. 1–33.
64. John Carey, *The Intellectuals and the Masses: Pride and Prejudice among the Literary Intelligentsia 1880–1939* (London: Faber and Faber, 2012).
65. *People and Homes*, p. ix.
66. For a fascinating account of Fremlin's role in Mass Observation, see Megan Faragher, *Public Opinion Polling in Mid-Century British Literature: The Psychographic Turn* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021).

67. 'Interviews in Fairholme Street and Hilmer Street', in Mass Observation Archive, 1-2-N Housing Studies. My thanks to Rebecca Goldsmith for pointing me towards this resurvey.
68. Gardiner and Cox, 'Housing at Hillingdon, London. Architects: Shankland Cox Partnership'.
69. Shankland Cox and Associates, *Social Survey, Childwall Valley Estate Liverpool* (Liverpool: Liverpool Estate, 1967).

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Chapter 8

Re-reading ‘race relations research’: journalism, social science and separateness

Christopher Hilliard

‘Race relations research’ – the study of Black and Asian people and their relations with white neighbours, employers and the state – occupies an ambiguous place in the history of postwar Britain’s democratic culture. On the one hand, researchers linked with the Institute of Race Relations (IRR) or university centres for urban studies, and with the ear of politicians and civil servants, exemplify the ‘politics of expertise’ that is often taken to be characteristic of the postwar period.¹ On the other hand, race relations research was part of a critical – or uncritical – public sphere, exposing discrimination and deprivation or stigmatising people of colour, depending on the study in question. The Penguin editions of race relations books by Michael Banton and Sheila Patterson did not become the foci of public debates on the same scale that Michael Young and Peter Willmott’s *Family and Kinship in East London* or Richard Hoggart’s *The Uses of Literacy* did, but they were nevertheless part of larger conversations about the condition of Britain. Ruth Glass’s *London’s Newcomers* reached a wide audience, in print and over the airwaves, standing out among the postmortems of the 1958 Notting Hill riots; in the late 1960s John Rex and Robert Moore’s *Race, Community, and Conflict* brought Birmingham’s council housing system a notoriety that prompted a change of policy.² Coverage of discrimination in social services within Britain was not subject to the same kind of structural blockages that Erik Linstrum has shown affected the reporting of colonial atrocities, but, as one researcher observed, ‘secrecy pervades the field’.³ The impulse to

break through that secrecy was one that some race relations researchers shared with investigative journalists.

The overlap with journalism does not register much in the historiography of the race relations research of the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, which exaggerates some of the social-scientific aspects of this work and underestimates others. In the most influential piece about 'race relations research' by a historian, Chris Waters read this body of work as a project of othering in the service of a reconstruction of British identity after the Second World War. Writing in 1996 at the height of the new cultural history's disciplinary self-assertiveness in British studies, Waters declared that whereas 'social historians . . . [had] pillaged it in their own attempt to write the history of Black experience in Britain', he would approach 'race relations' as a discursive formation. Waters argued that postwar migration 'gave rise to many anxieties' and 'resulted in the emergence of a new "science," that of "race relations" . . . One consequence of their work was the consolidation of the discursive framework through which race and nation came to be widely understood in academic and nonacademic liberal circles between the late 1940s and the early 1960s'.⁴ More recently, Jordanna Bailkin has situated race relations research in the nexus of decolonisation and the welfare state, where it constructed the figure of the 'Commonwealth immigrant' and informed policy on ethnic minorities. 'Decolonization and welfare both catalyzed new forms of knowledge production', Bailkin writes. 'The welfare state required a constant flow of information in order to monitor the success of its redistributive projects, and it relied on an army of experts to provide this knowledge'.⁵ In a related move, Marc Matera has shown how research on migrant populations in the metropole grew out of agendas and funding driven by the challenge of doing big business as usual in central Africa despite decolonisation.⁶ Rob Waters has read race relations research as a counterpoint to the 'social-democratic' or progressive postwar sociology described by Mike Savage and Jon Lawrence.⁷ 'State funding of race relations research in the 1970s marked a new development in welfare policy, specific to the incorporation of race relations into welfare-state management'. Endorsing the contemporary judgment of the sociologist A.H. Halsey (who did not study minority communities), Waters writes: 'The question often at the heart of the newly funded race relations research . . . was how to avoid black revolt'.⁸ In suggesting the existence of a racial welfare state, Rob Waters's account converges on Bailkin's; in arguing that race relations was 'an explicitly pacifying project', Waters's account aligns with Matera's.⁹ In this reading, race relations research was a kind of power/knowledge comparable to certain kinds of colonial anthropology, a means of knowing subaltern groups the better to manage them.

Historians' critiques of race relations research often give the impression that these studies focused almost exclusively on Black or (less commonly) Asian people. Yet many of the texts of postwar race relations scholarship also examined the workings of white racism in interactions between neighbours, and between Black Britons and the state. One of my goals in this chapter is to show how our assessment of race relations research changes if we pay more attention to the 'relations' part. The first two sections of the chapter probe what kind of inquiry 'race relations research' actually was. I emphasise the contribution of journalism, consider the relationship between sociology and social anthropology, and draw attention to quantitative sociological research and geography, both of which have been neglected in historians' accounts of race relations research. I then consider the value of this research for the study of racism, as distinct from its value as a source for 'the history of Black experience in Britain'. I use Sheila Patterson's *Dark Strangers* (1963) as a case study.

In his essay on Geoffrey Gorer's research on the English character in the 1950s, Peter Mandler remarked:

There remain 10,000 questionnaires in the bowels of the University of Sussex library, compromised by Gorer's framing of them but still offering a treasure trove of information on psychological topics not easily accessible by other means. All they require is for us to be better historians than Gorer was a social scientist.¹⁰

In the fifteen years since Mandler wrote that, British historians have transformed our understanding of ordinary people's languages of class and conceptions of the present and future by re-analysing archived questionnaires from postwar sociological research such as the *Affluent Worker* study or the birth cohort studies.¹¹ The research materials of contemporaneous race relations studies have not been preserved so well, and as many of them were not quantitative projects they would not have been amenable to reanalysis in the way the archived data from the *Affluent Worker* study are. Using Patterson's research like a good historian is a methodologically modest undertaking in comparison, one that relies on contextualisation from material in local archives, and reading an ungenerous book receptively.

Race relations research as social science

As Jordanna Bailkin has argued, a lot of the early postwar research in this area, predating the work coordinated by the IRR, was carried out by or under the influence of the Department of Social Anthropology at the

University of Edinburgh, under the leadership of Kenneth Little.¹² Little wrote his PhD thesis at the London School of Economics under the supervision of Raymond Firth. Little's thesis examined the African, Arab and Caribbean population of Cardiff's Bute Town.¹³ As head of department at Edinburgh from 1950, Little hired a number of junior scholars who would also produce studies of 'coloured quarters' in port districts. Banton's study of Stepney was the outcome of a postdoctoral fellowship at Edinburgh; Patterson wrote *Dark Strangers* as a research fellow at Edinburgh supervised by Little.¹⁴ Little and Banton did fieldwork in West Africa, Patterson had research experience in South Africa, and some of Little's other hires were from Africa. 'The indigene in Africa haunted the creation of the migrant in Britain', Bailkin observes, 'much as anthropology haunted the emergent discipline of sociology'. She adds: 'Anthropology was one of the key disciplines deployed in making sense of migration. But it was also the first to be written out'.¹⁵

The relationship between sociology and social anthropology in the study of migrants in Britain was not a clear-cut matter of succession, however. From the beginning, students of immigration in postwar Britain were heavily influenced by the University of Chicago tradition of urban sociology. Following Robert E. Park, many British researchers studying immigration from the Commonwealth and from eastern Europe were attentive to competition for resources such as housing as a site of interaction between new arrivals and established residents. They used the terms of Park's 'race relations cycle', such as 'accommodation', 'integration', and 'assimilation', though they sometimes treated them as different kinds of 'host'–'immigrant' relation rather than stages to be cycled through. (This was the approach Jerzy Zubrzycki took in his research on Poles in Britain, undertaken at the LSE under the informal supervision of Chicago sociology's ambassador to Cold War Britain, Edward Shils.¹⁶) Other Chicago school concepts, such as 'zones of transition', 'marginal men', and 'in-groups' and 'out-groups', recur in the work of British-based researchers in the 1950s.¹⁷ These concepts proved compatible with the 'participant observation' tradition of social anthropology. Mark Clapson takes Little's Cardiff study as his first example of 'the early influence of the Chicago School in Britain', but, as Freddy Foks observes, a 'more proximate, and likely decisive, influence on Little's work was the anthropological training he had done at the LSE'.¹⁸ Little's protégés Banton and Patterson drew on sociological *concepts*, but their *methods* remained indebted to their social anthropology background. Arguing against another succession narrative – Mike Savage's argument that sociology became modern 'by escaping the "gentlemanly" methods of social anthropology' – Foks makes the broader point that multiple domains of '1950s social science'

that are 'often subsumed wholly into the history of sociology, like the community studies of Michael Young or race relations research', in fact 'emerged out of the productive application of anthropological methods in urban Britain'.¹⁹

Insofar as sociology replaced social anthropology in race relations research, it did so in a way that Bailkin and other historians of the Edinburgh school or the IRR do not really address: as a consequence of the turn toward more sophisticated statistical analyses. Although Chris Waters emphasised race relations researchers' claims to scientific authority, he and the historians who have followed him have taken surprisingly little notice of the more assertively scientific, quantitative research on migrant communities undertaken in the 1960s. When Anthony Richmond appears in the historiography of race relations research it is usually as the author of another study of a Black community in a port city, in this case Liverpool, that paid significant attention to contemporary history and policy.²⁰ The later quantitative study *Migration and Race Relations in an English City* (1973) is seldom cited by historians interrogating race relations research.²¹ From the early 1960s, race relations research turned to quantitative methods, which of course was where a lot of the action was in British sociology at this time. One of the goals of its practitioners was to achieve a rigour (for instance in sampling and case study selection) that they believed was unattainable by social anthropology or the approach of the Institute of Community Studies.²²

In *Migration and Race Relations*, Richmond and his collaborators used data from Bristol to challenge other researchers' claims that migrants' fortunes in the housing market were best explained by factors other than race and racism – that people of colour became concentrated in areas of substandard housing for the same reasons as other groups with similar demographic profiles and similar positions in the labour market (such as single Irish men).²³ The Bristol project used the computing facilities of Richmond's employer, Bristol College of Science and Technology (which became Bath University of Technology early in the life of the project) to process interview schedules.²⁴ Richmond and his collaborators compared different indicators of housing quality (for instance, number of dwellings per building, number of households per dwelling, persons per room, availability of bath, toilet and hot water supply) for West Indian and Pakistani households and those of white residents who had moved to Bristol from other parts of England and from Wales. Heads of household were sorted into two main categories, 'white' and 'coloured', and further coded by age and occupational classification. 'A process of random selection was then used to create pairs of white and coloured respondents who were identical on each of the above variables'. The researchers compared each pair

using different statistical tests ('t' test, chi-square, and McNemar's test) for the several housing-quality variables.²⁵ Richmond's team concluded, 'with confidence', that 'the poorer living conditions experienced by coloured immigrants in the Bristol survey area are not due to demographic or ethnographic factors, but were almost certainly due to discrimination against them because of their race or national origin'.²⁶ This quantitative research does not fit the 'pacification' argument. It does not reconstruct Bristol's West Indian and Pakistani communities, but rather analyses a structure of relationships between white people and people of colour.

Geographers were less likely to publish with the IRR or use the phrase 'race relations' to describe their research, but a good deal of the research responding to the 'urban crisis' of the late 1960s and 1970s, and examining the impact of slum clearance on Black and Asian communities, was carried out by geographers. Some of this research, too, involved quantitative methods. The standard measure of residential segregation from the 1960s through the 1980s was the index of dissimilarity. Expressed as a percentage, the ID indicates what proportion of an ethnic group in a census enumeration district would need to move their residence to match the distribution pattern of the total population. A value under thirty was regarded as low; forty through forty-nine as moderate, fifty through fifty-nine as moderately high, sixty through sixty-nine as high, and over seventy as very high. In the United States, the laboratory for the social-scientific study of segregation, the African-American population's ID averaged 87.8 in over 200 cities in 1960; in studies of British cities in the 1960s and 1970s, the Black and Asian populations had IDs in the forties and fifties.²⁷ Establishing minority populations' indices of dissimilarity could help researchers (and civil servants) understand the effects of changes in housing policy in the 1960s and 1970s, as people of colour were allocated council housing in substantial numbers for the first time. It is odd that the work of geographers gets so little attention in the historiography of race relations research, as they fit the profile of the 'applied' social-science expert better than most of the 'anthropologists-cum-sociologists'.²⁸

In the late 1970s, the Oxford geographer Ceri Peach and his doctoral student Samir Shah (who became a television executive) undertook a study of the contribution of council housing allocation to 'West Indian desegregation' in London.²⁹ Civil servants in the Department of the Environment read it closely, producing three separate commentaries. They concluded it added little to other research they had seen, by the think tank Political and Economic Planning, and by the Greater London Council. They judged its broader conclusions (only changes across boroughs, not within areas of Caribbean concentration, would lead to

'desegregation') 'Fairly obvious . . . but now we shall be able to point to statistical evidence!'³⁰ The department proved much more receptive to a project by Valerie Karn, perhaps in part because Karn was sensitive to local practice and her work was not overwhelmingly quantitative. 'By examining Birmingham City Housing department's records, interviewing black and white families and working closely with Housing Department officers involved in the allocation process, it is intended to carry out an action and empirical research project on the opportunities available to, and choices made by, black families within the public sector'. In preliminary discussions, the Birmingham Housing Department indicated a willingness 'to co-operate in any proposed research on the movement of ethnic minorities from their existing concentrations. This is due to their recognition that there is a need for such research in Birmingham and that any results can be used by the Department in reviewing its policies and practices'.³¹ Civil servants in the Department of the Environment were eager to fund Karn's project as it 'would . . . provide important insights into several issues of central concern to DOE's interests in race and housing'.³²

The corporation of Birmingham also made some of its housing files available to another researcher, Hazel Flett, in the years after the West Midlands conciliation board found Birmingham's housing allocation policy contravened the Race Relations Act 1968.³³ Flett published a co-authored study of Birmingham's 'dispersal' initiative in the *Journal of Social Policy* and a narrative account of it in a series of working papers published by the Research Unit on Ethnic Relations established at the University of Aston with Social Science Research Council support in 1970. Flett characterises the latter as 'a chronological account', in contrast with the 'critical analysis' in the *Journal of Social Policy* article. Throughout the chronological account 'runs the theme of the governmental management of race relations in a racially unequal society'.³⁴ The 'working paper' was a narrative that quoted council documents, interviews with councillors and council staff, and press coverage. Despite its provenance and its unmistakably social-scientific form – a fifty-four-page typed and cyclostyled report – in its genre, register and evidence base Flett's chronological account had strong affinities with investigative journalism. The next section explores the connections between race relations research and journalism.

Race relations research as journalism

The journalistic aspects of a lot of 'race relations research' sit uneasily with the historiography's emphasis on science and expertise. It is not

simply that some of its practitioners (such as Elizabeth Burney and Lionel Morrison) were journalists by profession, or that its most prominent exponents in the early postwar decades wrote in a 'crossover' style. Banton wrote for the *Listener* and Patterson's *Dark Strangers* was serialised in the *People*. It was later paperbacked by Penguin Books, as one of Richmond's books was.³⁵ Many race relations studies overlapped with journalism in their methods as well as their manner.

Race relations studies often combined participant observation with inquiries to local councils and voluntary organisations. Sometimes they extended the privilege of anonymity to informants employed by councils. They reported public meetings and controversies, and they combed through local newspapers. Many chapters of 'race relations' books, with their footnotes to council documents and local newspapers, could easily be mistaken for exercises in contemporary history. The point may be illustrated by two studies by political scientists (a number of the academics who wrote studies for the IRR were political scientists rather than sociologists or anthropologists). L.J. Sharpe, a lecturer in government at the LSE, contributed the chapter on Brixton to the IRR volume that Nicholas Deakin edited on the 1964 election. Sharpe made inquiries of local officials as a reporter would, and seized on revealing details in stories he heard. He reported, for instance, that white customers of Brixton's laundrettes complained that black people put dirty underwear into washing machines.³⁶ David Beetham – another politics lecturer – wrote a book for the IRR about the disputes in Wolverhampton, Birmingham and Manchester over Sikh bus drivers campaigning to wear turbans rather than the caps that were (notionally) part of their uniform.³⁷ Beetham's *Transport and Turbans*, too, incorporated information from local newspapers, quotations from councillors and council staff, and aperçus about persons and situations. Though there could be no doubt about the authors' social-scientific credentials, the studies by Beetham, Sharpe and, as we will see, Patterson, rely for much of their information on the same kinds of direct inquiry as journalists writing topical books, such as (to take an example on a closely related subject) Paul Foot's book about the racially charged election campaign in Smethwick in 1964. Like the studies by these race relations researchers, Foot's book tracks issues and actors through the pages of the local newspaper, and quotes extensively from extended interviews and vox pops.³⁸

Race relations researchers also made investigative moves characteristic of newspaper reporting. Throughout the 1950s it was routine for advertisements for rented accommodation to stipulate 'No coloured', 'White people only', or 'English only' ('English only' was often used to

mean 'no Jews' as well as 'no Poles').³⁹ Landlords and letting agents who made no mention of race or nationality in their advertisements nevertheless proved unwilling to let to people of colour when asked: they evidently recognised that racism was embarrassing in the postwar world, but they still saw racial difference as a fact of life.⁴⁰ On more than one occasion newspaper reporters confirmed this when they called landlords and accommodation agencies to probe for unstated unwillingness to let to people of colour.⁴¹ In one of her studies of Notting Hill and its environs, Ruth Glass used the same tactic. She spoke to landlords whose ads made no mention of race and asked them whether they would accept a Black or Asian tenant. Glass received answers like this:

I'm only the housekeeper here, and I work for an agent. It's really against the conditions but I have taken one or two Indian people. You know, they're not so dark. I mean, well I could get away with it if they were not too obvious – well, if they are coffee-coloured, for example, or lighter.

Objections that a prospective tenant was not sufficiently 'light-skinned' often went together with a belief in insuperable cultural difference ('biological' and 'cultural' racism were never straightforward alternatives):

Well, we have our way of life, and they have theirs, don't we. But how dark is he? I mean, some are jet black and some are coffee-coloured. But if he's dark we couldn't consider it.

Rex and Moore's *Race, Community, and Conflict* had an impact outside social-scientific circles because of a finding that the authors reached by 'journalistic' rather than 'sociological' means. Rex and Moore noted that 'the application form of the Housing Department contains no reference to the colour or country of origin of the inhabitant' (nearby Wolverhampton explicitly discriminated by country of origin).⁴² '[I]n our talks with Council officials and Councillors we found a certain sense of pride in the formal justice of the scheme'. All the same, Rex and Moore observed, 'the scheme as it stands uses formal criteria to exclude the vast body of immigrants'.⁴³ Rex and Moore's revelation that Birmingham was effectively operating a segregated housing system attracted widespread media coverage that put pressure on the corporation.⁴⁴ The controversy prompted Birmingham to increase Black and Asian people's access to council housing (which in turn led to the introduction of quotas and, in time, more adverse press). So *Race, Community, and Conflict* had an impact similar to a journalistic exposé as well as sharing some of the methods of investigative reporting.

Dark Strangers revisited

Sheila Patterson's 1963 book about Brixton is Exhibit A in the case against 'race relations research'. *Dark Strangers* is institutionally representative. The book is the product of fieldwork carried out under Kenneth Little's supervision between late 1955 and the beginning of 1958 while Patterson worked in the Department of Social Anthropology at the University of Edinburgh. Patterson went on to work for the new Institute of Race Relations and revised the text substantially in the light of what she learned there and in response to the debates leading up to the passage of the immigration restriction legislation of 1962.⁴⁵ Other workers for what would later be derided as the 'race relations industry', such as Ruth Glass, had anti-racist credentials. Patterson did not, and the methods she shared with Glass were combined, in *Dark Strangers*, with openly racist judgments. Patterson normalised the racist assumptions of white Brixton residents (the pages about fostering and adoption, with their uninhibited comments about cute babies and unattractive babies, make especially distressing reading). In the process, though, Patterson documented those assumptions conscientiously.

In "Dark Strangers" in *Our Midst*, Chris Waters writes:

Patterson, in her account of the social and cultural differences between 'hosts' and 'strangers', began with a sentimental and sanitised account of traditional working-class life in Brixton. The 'respectable residents', she wrote, 'expect a tolerable and at least superficial conformity to "our ways"', a conformity to certain standards of order, cleanliness, quietness, privacy, and propriety. Clean lace curtains are hung at clean windows, dustbins are kept tidy and out of sight . . . and house fronts are kept neat. Houses do not give the impression of being packed to the brim with temporary and noisy strangers of both sexes. . . . Except for the children, people . . . "keep themselves to themselves" and life is lived quietly. . . . Marriage is the norm for decent girls'. In concluding her remarks . . . she wrote, 'No immigrant group has in the mass so signally failed to conform to these expectations and patterns as have the West Indians'. . . . In statements like these, the racial other was marked by the absence of qualities assumed to be central to the character of white Britons.⁴⁶

In the passage Waters is critiquing, Patterson makes some of the same rhetorical moves as contemporary opponents of immigration. Peter Griffiths's allies in Smethwick as he campaigned on immigration restriction spoke of respectable and orderly white people being displaced by chaotic and dissolute Black people.⁴⁷ Enoch Powell's 'rivers of blood' speech, with its

tableau of a widow living in 'a respectable street in Wolverhampton', worked with the same opposition between the cleanliness, order and propriety of an established white community and the squalor, chaos and implied immorality of 'dark strangers'.

Waters is thus right to read Patterson's treatment of working-class culture in terms of a postwar discourse of race and nation. But the terms of his critique block out the possibility of learning anything from Patterson about everyday discourses of race and the practices they shaped in Brixton. What information does *Dark Strangers* supply that is, in Mandler's words, 'not easily accessible by other means'? What does Patterson add to the extensive coverage of Black-white interactions in the *South London Press* (which she cited extensively) or the complaints by white people about their Black neighbours and landlords that were documented by the council's housing department and now available in the Lambeth Archives?

One answer involves Patterson's ability to play the investigative journalist. Aldermen and council staff briefed her anonymously, providing details and perspectives that are not duplicated in the archives or the newspapers but which can be triangulated with those other sources. One of her informants was a woman who had worked in the Town Hall and 'lived in a middle-class street into which a few coloured families had recently moved'. Her job involved fielding complaints from residents. She sketched for Patterson 'the main categories of objectors and objections'. The first category were established tenants of cheap leasehold houses that had been bought by people from the Caribbean or Nigeria. The second were residents of areas with a large Black population. (This second category overlapped with the first.) The third group were people like the informant herself, residents of 'better-class areas' that people of colour were starting to move into. The latter group were 'house-proud and object to the tone of the area going down. Most coloured people don't wash their windows, and they put their dustbins in the front garden. Some of them carry knives too'. Dustbins exposed to view, dirty windows: breaches of the community expectations Patterson listed in the passage Waters critiques. Tenants of Black landlords complained about life inside the building rather than outward appearances: 'dirty toilets, noise, and food smells'. 'Sharing a house usually works only when the toilet isn't shared', Patterson's informant remarked.⁴⁸ The Lambeth housing committee minute books bear this out. White tenants of Black landlords seeking a transfer into council housing routinely pointed out that they now had to 'share toilet and bathing facilities with the Jamaicans whose habits are different to theirs'.⁴⁹ For others it went without saying that sharing a toilet with people of colour was oppressive: 'This house has been purchased by coloured folk and the lavatory is shared by all persons in the house'.⁵⁰

Patterson followed up her informant's observations with 'a series of direct quotations' sampling white people's judgments about Brixton's Black residents. The sample reflects Patterson's interest in the variety of racist tropes. 'Don't be frightened', she reports a middle-aged white woman as saying on her doorstep. 'The dog won't go for anyone white'. What makes these racist vignettes more than just general confirmation of what can be found in other sources is Patterson's commitment to placing her informants, both geographically and socially ('Cheerful, rather slatternly middle-aged woman in untidy requisitioned basement flat in Angell Town').⁵¹ It makes a difference to know that an informant lived on or near Geneva and Somerleyton Roads, two streets of decaying houses where half the residents, and many of the owners, were Jamaicans (and which were municipalised in the late 1960s).⁵² One 'Old, rather difficult woman living alone on one half of small working-class house behind Geneva and Somerleyton Roads' used the N word to complain about the neighbours who 'made life hell for me' when she lived in a house on Somerleyton Road divided into flats.⁵³ A man still living on Somerleyton Road had a very different take. He was living in a caravan on a bomb site and worked as a variety performer. (Brixton had a reputation as the home of theatrical performers, and in the 1950s *The Stage* was still carrying classified ads for bedsits and lodgings in Brixton.)⁵⁴ 'We find the coloured people O.K.', he told Patterson. 'They mind their own business and are kind neighbours. They don't worry my wife or little girl either, but then we are show people, used to getting on with all colours and races'.⁵⁵

The attentiveness to place and social position is characteristic of Patterson's treatment of white Brixtonians' thinking about Black people. Patterson's account of working-class culture in Brixton is not, as Chris Waters assumes, 'universal', but one mindful of differences in urban communities in postwar Britain. Indeed, Patterson thought that the contours of working-class culture in Brixton helped explain the differences between 'race relations' there and in other parts of Britain. In an address to a conference of social workers in October 1958, when she had finished her Brixton fieldwork but had yet to write the book, Patterson suggested that the strength of 'respectability' in Brixton made it unlikely that rioting like that in Notting Hill or St Ann's in Nottingham two months earlier would take place in Brixton. In Brixton, Patterson told the conference, there were 'certain informal but generally-observed rules of behaviour, and perhaps even sanctions . . . It is felt that Brixton is, or should be, a respectable place, a place where people keep their front-steps scrubbed, dress respectably and do not brawl or behave noisily in public. Naturally, things don't always work out like that, but it is felt that they should'. It was not that Brixton was a less racist place than Notting Hill, but that

disorderly expressions of racism, or anything else, were more likely to be suppressed in Brixton.⁵⁶

Other researchers agreed. The sociologist Pearl Jephcott made a comparable judgment in her study of Ladbroke Grove, published around the same time as Patterson's book but based on fieldwork undertaken later, four years after the Notting Hill riots. Jephcott thought that the large number of transient residents meant that households in Ladbroke Grove and Notting Hill did not 'acquire that respect for "what the neighbours say" which, on the whole, probably supports the decent code'. Wives and mothers were not connected to networks of gossip, those sources of pleasure and discipline, that characterised more sedentary populations.⁵⁷ In the mid-1950s, a meeting on the 'welfare of coloured people in London' was told: 'There is less tension [between people of different races] in boroughs having a civic sense, e.g. Bethnal Green, and more tension in areas like Kilburn which lack a civic sense'.⁵⁸ Bethnal Green in the East End was the archetype of a close-knit 'traditional working-class community'; Kilburn in north London was home to large numbers of people from Ireland, mostly younger male workers. These observations by social workers and social scientists suggest that assumptions about good neighbourly behaviour were not simply a vector of racism, a cultural marker of difference between white working-class people and Black (or Irish) 'strangers', but also a cultural structure that inhibited the disruptive *expression* of racism.

In a study that Jon Lawrence has used to brilliant effect in showing working-class culture's premium on privacy and autonomy rather than mutualism, Raymond Firth identified a complex of 'fierce assertive separateness' in the 'ordinary mundane affairs' of the people of Bermondsey. Firth observed that the need to share space and facilities 'tends to divide and individualise households as much as bring them together'.⁵⁹ Working-class communities enforced expectations in multiple ways – force, gossip, ostracism, the withholding of credit and services – but the culture of 'assertive separateness' also created zones of relative impunity.⁶⁰ Patterson, in a sentence Chris Waters omits when sampling her list of the expectations of 'respectable' households in Brixton, remarked: 'Moral nonconformity is tolerated so long as it is discreet and causes no inconvenience to others'.⁶¹ This was of a piece with the injunction, also cited by Patterson, to 'keep yourself to yourself'. Firth's informants frequently declared: 'we keep ourselves to ourselves, and then we can't get into trouble'.⁶² Keeping yourself to yourself was a way of carving out some autonomy in cramped conditions – not just by keeping your own affairs private, but also by avoiding getting dragged into other people's business. James Vernon has argued that Britain became modern through abstracting technologies of power that supported a mobile and transactional 'society of strangers'.⁶³ I would add that the

working class had to evolve its own strategies of distancing to manage living in tense proximity in modern cities.

Some of the clichés Patterson reports – about the West Indians who minded their own business or the obligingly quiet Nigerian couple (‘you wouldn’t know they were there’) – suggest that it was possible that ‘assertive separateness’ translated into an unenthusiastic toleration of immigrants, provided they too kept themselves to themselves.⁶⁴ This was a conclusion that members of Britain’s community of Polish ex-servicemen and their families came to quickly, according to Jerzy Zubrzycki.⁶⁵ It may be that what was really expected of migrants was not ‘integration’ or ‘assimilation’, but making sure that their difference did not obtrude onto others. Patterson does not make this argument, but the testimony she gathered, and the things she noticed, provide a starting point for thinking about how popular expectations of neighbourly behaviour underwrote tolerance and intolerance in multicultural Britain. At the beginning of this chapter I suggested that race relations research should be seen as part of the public culture of democracy in postwar Britain. If I am right about the implied social contract of ‘keep ourselves to ourselves’ guiding white people’s responses to ethnic diversity, then race relations research can also help us understand the ‘vernacular liberalism’ of this moment.⁶⁶

Notes

1. M. Hilton, J. McKay, N. Crowson and J.-F. Mouhot, *The Politics of Expertise: How NGOs Shaped Modern Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), esp. pp. 64–5; M. Savage, *Identities and Social Change in Britain since 1940: The Politics of Method* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), chs. 3–4; J. Bailkin, *The Afterlife of Empire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), esp. pp. 7–11.
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52. Burney, *Housing on Trial*, pp. 139–45.

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65. Zubrzycki, *Polish Immigrants in Britain*, pp. 168–9.
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Interlude F

The Historical Association, schools and the History curriculum

Andrew Stacey-Chapman and Rebecca Sullivan

A curious notion held by both press and policymakers is that the historian is the expert even when the need for expertise calls for an understanding of what the History curriculum in schools looks like and how it should be implemented. Many round tables and expert groups can be found groaning with the weight of expertise yet remarkably light on anyone who actually teaches in a UK state primary or secondary school. Any review of the National Curriculum will invariably result in endless columns in tabloids and broadsheets listing what Professor X believes should be in the History curriculum. No other school subject elicits quite that level of press interest.¹

It is true many academics, not just historians, have a keen interest in how their subject is taught in schools, mostly with one eye on those young people whom they will eventually teach in tertiary education. However, for many, discussion about school curricula is treated as a parlour game. School History is a topic worth having a view on but, mysteriously, not one worthy of serious academic study or investment of significant time. Relatively few understand the disciplinary purpose of their subject in the curriculum, the competing pressures on subject, subject discipline, time and accountability measures with which teachers must grapple or that the vast majority of young people they teach will not be pursuing History at degree level.

Peter Mandler has a rare interest in that wider educational setting, in the variety of schools and pupils and the broader curricular requirements teachers are dealing with to create engaging and purposeful History

curricula for their students.² As president of the Royal Historical Society and then the Historical Association during a period when the National Curriculum, GCSE and A-Level criteria were under review, Peter brought to these roles an understanding that school curricula are contested, living things that exist not in policy documents but in real-life interactions between teachers and their students. Central to this work is the powerful belief that history academics are, after all, teachers themselves.

In early February 2013, Rebecca was in her office listening to Parliament and expecting an announcement on GCSE reform. Andrew was half-way through his History PGCE at Cambridge. For both, the announcement by the Secretary of State that a full draft of the National Curriculum for History was being published for consultation was most unexpected.³ The document published for Key Stages 1–3 was derided by virtually the entire history community and the support given by the Royal Historical Society to the Historical Association in affecting change was vital.⁴ History was lucky that a period of significant curriculum reform – affecting all ages from four to eighteen – not only coincided with Peter’s presidency of the Royal Historical Society, but with Professor Arthur Burns as vice-president with Education as his brief. To have two highly respected and thoughtful academic historians in a position to comment with care and knowledge on the History curriculum helped history make strong representation to government at a difficult time for the discipline in schools. Arthur Burns represented the Royal Historical Society in many government round tables and – more importantly – in quieter and more detailed discussions which eventually led to the revised curriculum of September 2013.⁵ Arthur’s care in working closely with those who drafted a revised curriculum published for consultation in the summer of 2013 made a real difference. Both Peter and Arthur knew the September 2013 National Curriculum for History was not ideal, but that it was significantly better than the alternatives.

Curriculum change and development is not always a top-down dictate from government; teachers are affected by their students’ interests, by their local settings and by broader social change. Many academic experts fall into the trap of thinking the National Curriculum is a list of content teachers follow rather than a guidance document which can enable freedom to create and develop different stories for their students. A significant contribution from Peter was to articulate to a wide audience that, over the course of the last century, historical research has continuously broadened the range and diversity of the people and forms of human behaviour it explores, and that the content of the curriculum and of public examination specifications needs to be reviewed regularly in the light of current good scholarship.

Here, we see the role of Peter and other historians not just in studying the relationship between mass education and democracy, but in actively taking part in it. Perhaps the most important change in school History in recent decades has been the extent to which History teachers themselves have engaged with the processes of curricular thinking. Faced with changes to the National Curriculum and examination reform, a community of History teachers has taken up the collective challenge of shaping and reshaping the ‘stuff’ of school History to make it rigorous, wide-ranging and well-learned by students. At a whole-curriculum level, this is shown by teachers’ engagement with national debates about the curriculum in conference papers, peer-reviewed journal articles and on social media.⁶ However, it is perhaps more powerfully demonstrated by the confidence with which History teachers in UK schools make micro-curriculum decisions every lesson of every day. Faced with an unexpected extra hour of lesson time or, more often, an unexpected loss of time, History teachers are increasingly equipped to make these decisions in an informed way that maximises the curriculum’s impact on students. School History teachers, then, are not passive conduits between an expertly written National Curriculum and their students. Rather, with support from organisations like the Historical Association, thousands of school History teachers are themselves part of a process of democratisation in the historical profession by taking up the challenge of thinking about their discipline, their subject matter and how best to teach it to students. In doing so, teachers have taken up their role as experts in their own right.⁷ Those academics who have chosen to engage seriously with this process have been invaluable to recent developments in school History. And schools are, after all, where most people learn most of the history they know.

Notes

1. For example, K. Sellgren, ‘Historians Split over Gove’s Curriculum Plans’, *BBC News*, 27 February 2013.
2. Peter’s interest and expertise in the wider context of schools and school History can be seen through his work on the Secondary Education and Social Change project, a research project by the University of Cambridge and funded by the ESRC, see <https://sesc.hist.cam.ac.uk/>.
3. Department for Education, ‘Draft Purpose, Aims, Attainment and Programme of Study for History, Key Stage 1 to 3’ (2013).
4. A detailed and thoughtful response to the draft curriculum can be found in K. Hall and C. Counsell, ‘Silk Purse from a Sow’s Ear? Why Knowledge Matters and Why the Draft History NC Will Not Improve It’, *Teaching History*, 151 (2013), pp. 21–6.
5. Department for Education, ‘National Curriculum in England: History Programmes of Study’, 11 September 2013.

6. Such thinking can be found throughout the pages of *Teaching History*, the Historical Association's secondary school history journal. For example, M. Riley and J. Byrom, 'Professional Wrestling in the History Department: A Case Study in Planning the Teaching of the British Empire at Key Stage 3', *Teaching History*, 112 (2008), pp. 6–14.

7. An example of the democratisation of expertise among History teachers is the 'Meanwhile, elsewhere . . .' project, see <https://meanwhileelsewhereinhistory.wordpress.com/> (accessed 1 September 2024). Its creators wrote about the project in W. Bailey-Watson and R. Kennett, 'Harnessing the Power of Community to Expand Students' Historical Horizons', *Teaching History*, 176 (2019), pp. 36–43.

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Chapter 9

‘Democracy’ and ‘expertise’ in two secondary modern schools in Liverpool, 1930–67

Rosie Germain

This chapter focuses on the place of democracy and teacher expertise in two schools in Liverpool: Dovecot Secondary Modern School for Girls, and Dovecot Secondary Modern School for Boys. I interpret democracy’s role in education in two ways. Firstly, democracy relates to universal suffrage that, after 1928, was secured for women as well as men over twenty-one years, thus enabling all adults to apply political pressure for an education system they desired for their children.¹ Secondly, a democratic education system is considered to be one that, as it was conceived in the influential 1943 white paper *Educational Reconstruction*, offers all children the same opportunities regardless of financial background, while respecting different individual talents and interests.² Peter Mandler identifies that mid-century changes to education were produced by an expanded notion of democracy: that it now required an education system that provided ‘equal opportunity to acquire intelligence, to keep one’s options open as long as possible’.³ Key to mid-century notions of democracy, also, were attitudes of mutual respect between different social classes, and expectations of social class mixing in all aspects of life.⁴ Commitment to these democratic ideals in education remain in Britain today.⁵ The two Liverpool schools that I use to assess the extent to which these democratic principles were realised in practice were autonomous, with different management teams, head teachers and separate inspections. As secondary moderns, these schools were part of the opening up of secondary schooling to all for the first time after 1944.

In that year, 1944, the Butler Education Act obliged all local education authorities to offer secondary education to all children in their wards. Prior to 1944, only around fifteen per cent of the nation's children attended secondary school, with most attending one elementary school from the age of five to fourteen.⁶ Mandler has detailed how, while expanding access to education, secondary moderns also came to be associated with limitations to democracy because of the barriers they posed to 'equality of opportunity'.⁷ Secondary moderns were attended by most young people in the 1950s and disproportionately by the working classes, whose parents were the least likely to have accessed secondary education themselves. They came to be maligned because attendance at them meant students had failed the test to attend the alternative on offer – the cost-free state grammar schools. Grammar schools were seen to provide more educational, and life, opportunities than the secondary modern.⁸ Both Dovecot secondary moderns were closed in 1967 and merged with Finch Hall Secondary Modern schools to form Yew Tree Comprehensive School. Yew Tree was one of five comprehensives created in Liverpool in 1967 when education was reorganised along comprehensive lines that were deemed to be more democratic than the previous binary system of education.⁹

Comprehensives were a product of democracy in England whereby, since 1928, all adults over twenty-one had the vote regardless of property ownership. Indeed, mass schooling was linked to democracy since its beginnings in 1870 when Parliament committed to the provision of elementary school places for all children (up to the age of ten).¹⁰ The mechanism through which this was delivered at that time, the School Board, was to become one of the few local government bodies for which, before the 1894 Local Government Act, women could vote for representatives, and could also stand as candidates.¹¹ By 1944 all adults had the vote. As all children were now in secondary schools until the age of fifteen, all parents were thus potentially concerned with them. Politicians were therefore sensitive to parents' views on schools as policies amenable to the majority of parents could win elections. Indeed, the opinion researcher Mark Abrams, when commissioned by the Labour Party in 1957 to gather parental opinions, reported that two thirds wanted their children to have an educational experience akin to that offered in grammar schools, and felt strongly that the secondary modern disadvantaged children.¹² It made electoral sense, therefore, for Labour and the Conservatives to dismantle the bi-partite system that drove such discontent.

This chapter picks out three key themes from the history of the Dovecot schools and the Liverpool Education Committee which was the

official board that oversaw education in the city. Firstly, we see teachers' construction of separate gender identities in these schools after 1945, thus making them spaces where democracy as understood as 'equality of opportunity' between people born as different biological sexes was absent. Secondly, I address teachers' attempts to share their expertise with parents through a variety of means, and at a time of anxiety about juvenile delinquency. Teacher interventions in parenting could support democracy if empowering parents with knowledge and working to protect children's right to a good childhood. They could also help to create safe schools if interventions stopped some children from moving towards criminality. However, teacher advice could also emerge from biased profiling of working-class parents as inadequate, thus withholding a key democratic moral attitude from this community: respect. Finally, I use these examples from the past to contextualise aspects of education that sociologists have identified in England in the present, and reflect on their significance for democracy. In the following section, I consider the past in relation to greater gender equality in education today. In the conclusion I reflect on the extension of state intervention with parenting to the early years in 2007, continued differences in educational experience according to socio-economic background, and a greater emphasis today on inclusion of students with special educational needs in mainstream schooling.

Creating gender difference in the secondary modern school

Teachers upheld gender differences in Dovecot schools, and received local council support in doing so. The curriculum was different for boys and girls, and woodwork stations in the boys' school were swapped out for cookery rooms in the girls' school. Post-school destinations diverged, with housework training institutes widely attended by girls, and jobs in the printing trade for boys. Whole school projects and extracurricular trips were built around the assumption of gender roles. In England such restrictions on choice for boys and girls were significantly reduced after the National Curriculum in 1988, and would now be illegal under the terms of the 2010 Equality Act. One result of these more recent changes is that at secondary school, disadvantaged girls outperform boys from the same background in all areas except advanced maths at age ten (Key Stage 2). However, disadvantaged females are still under-represented in STEM subjects in higher education with twenty-four per cent choosing this route in

2013, as compared to forty-seven per cent of boys.¹³ Such statistics are accompanied by lower levels of self-belief among girls, even in those many subjects where they outperform boys, but also particularly, it seems, in maths.¹⁴

Evidence of the rigid and multifaceted strategies used by teachers to impose separate identities on girls and boys suggests that some of the roots of gender differences today may be in the passing of cultural attitudes around what is 'boys' work' and 'girls' work', and capabilities, between the two or three generations since then, even though the curriculum is no longer intentionally gender-divided.

The creation of gender difference in secondary modern schooling is no surprise. Before 1944, teachers educating most children up to the compulsory leaving age were advised by government to teach geography to girls in terms of fashion and food, and in terms of science for boys.¹⁵ Lynn Cook writes of female secondary modern students sewing sails and pennants, and males creating a boat's hull, for a school boat building project in a school in 1949.¹⁶ Gary McCulloch emphasises the endorsement of such gendered approaches in the education of the 'ordinary' female that prepared them for 'their lives in their homes in the future' in the 1963 Newsom Report.¹⁷

While curricula in the grammar school were intentionally gender-neutral on the whole, gender affected education across all levels of English education including here.¹⁸ Some parents chose to support their sons', but not daughters', entry to the state grammar in the 1950s as they expected this to enhance boys' future earning power, whereas daughters' future successes were tied to whom they married.¹⁹ Men and women who did progress to university from grammar schools in England from the 1920s to the 1960s could have very different experiences. Women could not graduate from Cambridge until 1948, and female graduates from Birmingham in the 1960s went into teaching in far greater numbers than men.²⁰ Even as early-career academics in philosophy, women experienced nudging from male superiors who assumed their interest would be in moral and emotions-based, rather than the seemingly more technical analytic, variants. This was particularly the case at Oxford, where women academics such as Iris Murdoch and Mary Warnock were, on account of their gender, also often seen as curiosities in the 1950s.²¹

The construction of masculinity and femininity in some schools in the 1950s, and different experiences for men and women in education, is no surprise, then. Social-scientific texts of the time, often written by middle-class and female authors in the USA, France and England, acknowledged such constraining cultural assumptions, as well as challenging them.²² However, examples of secondary modern schools in Dovecot in the late

1940s and 1950s show that oppression of working-class women was intensifying just as middle-class women appeared to be experiencing more freedoms. Judith Hubback's 1957 work, *Wives Who Went to College*, on the disappointments of the university-educated woman who was expected to return home rather than to the workplace, reflects a different experience of gender oppression than was experienced by most working-class secondary modern girls. The majority of such girls, as Val Brooks has shown, were not even offered the opportunity to take external examinations that might lead to university in 1960.²³ Laura Carter has indicated that many secondary modern schoolgirls were specifically let down by education because they wanted to enter hairdressing, but were not offered relevant qualifications, or pathways, through their schools.²⁴ The examples of gender-specific schooling at Dovecot illuminate the powerful currents that women's rights advocates were fighting against from the 1950s onwards. Feminist social-scientific texts reassured activists of the validity of their mission by providing concrete, rational arguments and powerful concepts to challenge the gendered status quo strengthened by education after the war.

Educators at Dovecot Girls shaped students according to gender assumptions in various ways. Girls and boys learnt different things, and were encouraged to behave differently. Teaching of housecraft and household management was prioritised in Dovecot Girls. In April 1955, girls were taken to a department store to practise effective household planning, something routine across many secondary moderns.²⁵ At Dovecot the event was recorded in the log book:

A group of fourteen girls visited G.H. Lee's store with Mrs. Palmer. They were shown furniture, china and glass. The visit was planned to help them make a wise selection when buying these items.²⁶

In the July 1955 Speech Day special prizes were also awarded for girls' performance in 'Housecraft' and 'Household Management', thus incentivising hard work and commitment in these areas. On a tour of the school a few months later during a parents' evening, parents were also shown around the Housecraft rooms, with current female students serving them 'afternoon tea'.²⁷ This sent a message to parents that secondary education for girls should prepare them for future life in the home. Most parents in the 1950s would not have experienced secondary education themselves.²⁸ Thus educational authorities were tasked with first defining, then often explaining, the purpose of secondary schools to parents who may have trusted educators' decisions to varying degrees.

In addition to an education that ensured girls identified personal success with mastery of housework, they were also encouraged to place great

personal value on appearances, with a further special prize in successive prize days in the 1950s being offered for 'Posture'.²⁹ Women's value was also equated with their appearance as they entered universities in greater number in the first half of the twentieth century. One student at Birmingham remembered male students' encouragement of the chancellor to 'kiss' the female graduates.³⁰

Teachers' autonomy was perhaps at its greatest in the twentieth century in the secondary modern in the 1950s. Yet, the specific type of girls' education delivered was endorsed and shaped by the wider environment that the school existed in. For instance, Liverpool City had the F.L. Calder School of Domestic Science (named after one of the founders of Domestic Science, Fanny Calder) which was one of the foundation colleges of John Moores University. Scores of school leavers went to the F.L. Calder College after completing their studies at Dovecot. At the college in the 1940s and 1950s, girls could and did study housework, dressmaking and first aid, among other topics. Afterwards, some went on to be housework teachers themselves.³¹ Domestic Science training and qualifications were held in such esteem that in 1952 the Liverpool Education Committee footed the bill for it in cases of need, as when they agreed 'the fees for a two-years' course in Institutional Management at the F.L. Calder College of Domestic Science (including a charge for dinners) be remitted in the case of Miss. [Bloggs]'.³² The Committee also subsidised all F.L. Calder students' travel across the city for their classes.³³

Expectations of male students at Dovecot Boys were different than for the girls. Half a day of every week in all year levels was devoted to woodwork, where students would make a variety of things including violin stands.³⁴ Boys also applied their woodwork in the school play in 1948, praised for making 'moving scenery', where 'the girls have handmade superb costumes'.³⁵ Boys were taught how to use the printing machine, most likely in the 'Craft' sessions that were separate from woodwork. The printing teacher, Mr D.M. Thomas, commented in 1947 that fifty per cent of the boys who had been trained to use the machine over the past decade had entered the printing trade.³⁶ No printing was taught in the girls' school, as indicated in a credit on their 1954 Prize Day leaflet that stated it was 'Printed by the boys of Dovecot Secondary Modern School'.³⁷ An education tailored for boys was supported by the local Liverpool community. The local press reported on the print-making skills learnt by boys at Dovecot and celebrated both the employment prospects of boys that resulted, and the skills of the teacher. There was further praise in the press for boys' work in making their own cameras, and the quality of

photographs they went on to develop in an afterschool club, and that were celebrated in a public exhibition in 1949. Thus we read that:

Thirty-eight certificates of merit were presented to pupils by Liverpool City Councillor Sydney Smart who congratulated the boys and their parents on the excellent work of the club evidenced by the display of prints.³⁸

Adulatory press coverage of Dovecot did not stop with boys' printing expertise and excellence in photography. Boys from the school were also recorded as triumphing in a boxing match against a school in Leeds in 1947, and as drawing with boys from Roberts' School Bootle the same year.³⁹

Contemporary evaluations by inspectors and in the press point to a varied education in the boys' school, delivered by committed teachers. English, History, Geography, Arithmetic, Science, Art, Craft, Woodwork, Music and Physical Education were all taught, and by the school inspector's estimation in 1952, taught well. The encouragement of independent reading was particularly praised, along with the library that the headmaster's wife had built up.⁴⁰ The devotion of the printing teacher, Mr D.M. Thomas, who taught boys during the Craft lessons, was evident in interviews with the press in which he said that

The idea as in most of our school work, is to develop a sense of self-reliance in that a boy, when he leaves, knows he can do this, that and the other; to bring about in his mind a sense of craftsmanship, for accuracy and fineness of finish, and I find that printing does all these things.⁴¹

An investment in using education to instil a sense of accomplishment, confidence and care over future work was clearly a key goal of the classes this teacher delivered.

If parents hoped for their children to go on to higher education, or jobs that were different in nature from their own, though, these ambitions were less likely to be achieved at Dovecot. Printing was a common leavers' job. Other destinations listed by the 1952 inspector included engineering and building trades, shop, factory and garden work. The inspector also noted that the boys' parents had performed jobs that ranged from mining, to trawler fishing, to being a ship's steward.⁴² Therefore, just as the boys that Laura Carter has considered in Coleridge School Cambridgeshire at this time, the destinations of most boys at Dovecot were manual and skilled labour work in line with the types of work conducted by their parents. At Dovecot, as at Coleridge, boys were also taken on trips to coal

mines.⁴³ In the log book we see that in 1949 boys were taken to Old Boston Colliery in Lancashire – a trip that was ‘planned right to the coal face’.⁴⁴ Even though Mr Thomas claimed printing classes were non-vocational he took boys to Printing and Boundary Works at Prescott the year before the coal mine trip, in 1948.⁴⁵ The consistency of experiences between boys in this secondary modern in Liverpool and in Coleridge school indicates the uniformity of secondary modern experiences despite the absence of a national curriculum to standardise education up to age fourteen, as was the case in England after 1988. Inspectors, extension of pedagogical practices from the elementary schools in the pre-war system, and government reports fed into such uniformity.⁴⁶

The restricted curriculum in secondary moderns across England in the 1950s correlated with limited university access for most children attending these schools, with access rates to higher education in England in general standing at eight per cent in 1960.⁴⁷ Higher education refers to post-eighteen education that included universities, teacher training colleges, art and technical colleges.⁴⁸ Six boys were transferred from Dovecot to grammar schools between 1949 and 1952, where the curriculum placed less emphasis on craft.⁴⁹ However, the evidence of curriculum, school trips and destinations of leavers demonstrate that parents’ sense, as identified by Mandler, that secondary moderns offered limited access to higher education and associated professions was founded in reality.

There can be little doubt from these examples that part of a teacher’s expertise was in shaping working-class men and women for different social roles. The construction of gender identities in these schools was totalising – stretching from the curricula designed for the world of manual work for men, and housework for women, through to extracurricular trips geared to heighten women’s interest in shopping, and prescribed roles for boys and girls in supporting amateur dramatics. Finally, there were different expectations based on physicality – for girls the emphasis was good posture, and for boys it was on developing an imposing physicality with bodily power great enough to knock someone out.

Despite the straitjackets of the female and male curricula, not all aspects of schooling involved coercion into a pre-conceived gender identity. The personal qualities the printing teacher sought to develop in boys – independence of judgment, precision and care for instance – were not particularly gendered. Likewise, religious aspects of the school life for the girls celebrated characteristics that were universally desirable. Quoting the Ephesians in a 1955 School Assembly, teachers called on the female students to be ‘helping others in trouble or ill-health’, ‘to speak only that which is true, and to behave loyally to one another – may we never be afraid to admit our faults and to accept the blame’.⁵⁰

The different school 'houses' also venerated strong female role models who went against the grain. In the same assembly where the Ephesians were quoted, 'Grace Darling' House, for instance, celebrated their namesake. Darling was said to have 'had physical courage and faith' and, 'persuaded her father' who was a lighthouse keeper to go with her to save some shipwrecked men with the result that 'Grace Darling went out and managed to rescue nine people from the wreck'. Darling's act of heroism was deemed even more impressive as the male 'crew of the life-boat refused to go out because of the fierceness of the storm and said that . . . Grace and her father would never reach the wreck'.⁵¹ Darling was therefore celebrated for her agency, critical judgment and willingness to challenge male wisdom – both of her father and the life-boat crew – to act in line with her conscience. Some female graduates of Dovecot were also able to go against the evident grain of the school, with one or two students attending the University of Liverpool in the 1940s and 1950s.⁵²

Opportunities for boys who wished to subvert the gender norms constructed and sustained through their limited curriculum were limited. Any existing interest in needlework, cooking, or housecraft, or a potential to develop an interest, was thwarted for boys who would have no opportunity to study these subjects. Similarly, no opportunities were offered to girls to discover or pursue interests in photography, woodwork, metalwork or printing. There were therefore lost opportunities for society to benefit from individuals who may have excelled in these areas but whose access to them had been restricted. This system also normalised rigid and stereotypical thinking based on biological sex, as well as socio-economic background, as most children in secondary moderns were from the least affluent backgrounds in society. Despite this, there were contradictions inherent in gender ideology. Restriction of children's subject choices were justified by an appeal to differences between the sexes, but moral life lessons and assemblies could hold up gender-neutral qualities for girls to aspire to, and indeed carried the message that women could be as physically and emotionally strong as men.

Gender stereotyping extended to some of the education of girls registered with special educational needs (SEN) at Dovecot in 1952. The criteria for SEN at Dovecot was to have an IQ of below seventy-eight, as measured on the Terman-Merrill scale. These children, of whom there were seventeen in total, were educated in a special school separate from the rest of the children. Nevertheless, four out of thirteen girls who were in the special school joined the girls in the mainstream school for housecraft lessons. On the whole, however, children in the special school were released from some aspects of gender segregation, as this part of the school was co-educational. In general, these co-educated children were regarded as

having classes that effectively supported them to be ‘lively and responsive’ and also to ‘take some pride in their appearance’.⁵³ However, for the boys and most of the girls there was no engagement with the rest of the school, and limited specialist support. This example indicates that a commitment to the construction of gender difference was present in most facets of secondary modern schooling in Dovecot. However, in the hierarchy of priorities, gender construction took a back seat in favour of teaching basic social skills to children with SEN.

This evidence from Dovecot shows humans’ ability to subscribe to two contradictory goals at the same time – such as directing women to domesticity while also raising aspirations for their heroic leadership outside of the home. Secondly, it indicates an awareness that the gender divisions were artificially created but also an overriding belief among educators at this time that this narrowing of options was necessary in order for society to function. Finally, the inconsistencies in school cultures provided resources for potential activists to challenge the state-sanctioned oppression of men and women. Restrictions continued to be placed on girls when comprehensivisation started in Liverpool in 1967. As the Liverpool Education Committee reflected, there is ‘substantially greater provision of comprehensive places for boys than girls’. A cap on comprehensive school places was set at 1,950 for boys, and 1,500 for girls, even though there were only 215 fewer girls than boys to be placed that year.⁵⁴ Laura Carter has shown that this trend in LEAs awarding more places to boys than to girls persisted into the 1970s.⁵⁵ Parental attitudes in 1967 were in line with the council’s, with far more parents of boys (2,403 boys) than of girls (1,782 girls) placing the comprehensive as their first choice.⁵⁶ The next section will consider the relationship between parenting and secondary moderns in more detail.

Teacher expertise on ‘parenting’

In the 1940s and 1950s, teachers believed their social role extended to influence over parenting. Gendered assumptions continued when teachers believed that mothers were responsible for day-to-day childcare, and fathers were responsible for their sons’ job prospects at Dovecot Boys. Teachers were very direct, inviting mothers to talks on good parenting, and writing to fathers to encourage interest in their sons’ future employment, and communicating – in block letters on official communications – that parents should show an interest in what their children were learning. Teachers’ efforts to influence parenting also fit into a well-documented context of ‘moral panic’ about ‘juvenile delinquency’, and reflect their

desire to communicate the expectations around a form of schooling – secondary – that most parents would not have experienced themselves.

There was a national ‘moral panic’ about juvenile delinquency after the Second World War that the government felt obliged to offer responses to and that culminated in a national conference in March 1949. Much of the perceived increase in youth crime after the war was, as government ministers themselves believed, down to changes in the way youth crime was counted, rather than any real increases.⁵⁷ At Dovecot, just as elsewhere, however, attempts to reduce youth crime were not just about appearances. Between 1949 and 1952, four students were transferred to approved schools because the school could no longer control them.⁵⁸ Specific criminal behaviour mentioned in the boys’ log book between 1947 and 1954 ranged from stealing apples from an orchard close to the school, to several counts of breaking and entering, one of larceny, and throwing fireworks into the adjoining girls’ school and causing physical harm to one of the students there as a result.⁵⁹ The last incident was reported in the girls’ school log book:

During playtime . . . a number of boys from St. Edwards School and one ex-pupil of the Boys Department made a nuisance by throwing lighted fire-works into the girl’s playground . . . a girl in Upper II . . . was burnt on the chest and the dress singed on the lapel. The police were informed and the group scattered.⁶⁰

There was, therefore, some criminal behaviour among boys at Dovecot. However, it was not above the national average, with four transfers to approved schools in a three-year period in line with rates recorded in some parts of the Midlands in the 1950s, one town in which had four per cent of fourteen-year-olds cautioned or convicted at the end of that decade. The criminologist John Barron Mays also reported that delinquency declined in Liverpool between 1951 and 1957.⁶¹ Some of the crimes that boys were accused of were also common among young people testing boundaries. In 1949, an East End vicar, for instance, when talking about delinquency there, confessed that ‘when I was a boy I would have jumped over a wall into an orchard and stolen apples’.⁶²

Consonant with trends at the time, H.V. Clark, the headmaster of Dovecot, in 1945 cited working mothers as one driver for juvenile delinquency. Writing in a local newspaper, *The Prescott Reporter*, Clark argued that ‘mothers with families should be discouraged from taking full employment’.⁶³ In the absence of concrete reasons for the causes of youth crime, cultural hostility to working mothers meant they were deemed culpable. Working women supplemented the family income, and so could have aided children’s education given that, as I will show Clark himself

said elsewhere, delinquency in the form of bad attendance could stem from insufficient funds to buy adequate clothing. Nevertheless, the 1949 Home Office and Education Department conference on juvenile delinquency similarly laid the blame for this on the home and, as Bradley has argued, 'a lack of knowledge of mothercraft'.⁶⁴ In 1950, the *National Association of Headteachers* concluded that working mothers caused youth crime.⁶⁵ The perception of failing mothers was no less entrenched at Dovecot School. A new headmaster joined the school in October 1947, Mr Ernest Winter, and he was committed to sharing expertise on parenting. In August 1948 Winter set up a talk to mothers from a famous Liverpool teacher, Miss Jessie Reid Crosbie, who by then had received an OBE for her services to education. Speaking to mothers at Dovecot in 1948, Crosbie called on them to see themselves as teachers, and to impose discipline in line with that identity. Crosbie referred to 'that school called home', and said that 'mother is headmistress'. Teachers noted that Crosbie's speech was 'well received'.⁶⁶ However, a second talk by Crosbie in 1949, focused on the 'Curfew and Delinquency', was reported as poorly attended and 'would have done good had the right parents attended. As it was it was preaching to the converted'.⁶⁷

If mothers were expected to lead home-based discipline, teachers aimed to strengthen fathers' role in their children's post-school employment. In 1948, letters were sent out by the school to fathers inviting them to attend a jobs evening. Members of the Juvenile Employment Bureau and school teachers would be present. The letter was clearly worded to set down norms that fathers should be adhering to in terms of their sons' post-school prospects. Headmaster Winter wrote:

Your son will be leaving this school very shortly. No doubt you are anxious that he should be placed into suitable and congenial work in which he will have opportunity for promotion. You may also wish to consult the teachers of the school and you should certainly be aware of the types of employment now available . . . we are confident that fathers are already worrying this matter out for themselves and would welcome an opportunity to discuss it.⁶⁸

The response to these letters was 'poor' and in the end twelve out of a possible twenty-six fathers attended the employment event for school leavers.⁶⁹ Teachers continued to invest energy into influencing fathering practices, holding a 'Father's Night' in December, the pamphlet for which had a statement in block capitals at its end urging parents to 'WALK ROUND AND SPEAK TO ANY OF THE MASTERS . . . THEY WANT TO KNOW THE FATHERS AND MOTHERS OF THE BOYS THEY TEACH.

PLEASE INTRODUCE YOURSELVES TO THEM SO THAT THEY CAN CONNECT YOU WITH YOUR OFFSPRING.’⁷⁰

Attendance at the Father’s Night was not recorded, but it is possible that the disappointing audience for the jobs night, and teachers’ impression that they had to literally shout at fathers (in capital letters) to show an interest in their children’s education may be due to a variety of factors. Firstly, some fathers’ seemingly hands-off approach to their children’s education may actually have been a rejection of the condescending tone of the invitations sent by the headmaster. Low turn-out at jobs night may have been because the boy already had a job set up for him, or the father was working late. Fathers’ scepticism about the value of education, and authority of teachers, may also have played a part. Certainly, in Jackson and Marsden’s study of grammar schools in Huddersfield in the 1950s, they locate a range of responses among working-class parents whose sons were at secondary school, and thus, oftentimes, were experiencing something they had not. One father was reported as entering his son’s study room repeatedly, disturbing him from studies, sometimes forcing conversations about Rugby League.⁷¹ While some fathers discussed their sons’ career choices in the 1950s, mothers also guided their children through school and into the job market. Thus teachers may have effectively targeted their employment evenings to mothers as much as to fathers at this time.⁷²

Dovecot teachers’ sense that their expertise was about parenting as much as about curriculum and pedagogy is clearly evident in the 1940s and 1950s. This fits into a long tradition of educators disciplining parents for not engaging with the obligatory schooling provided to school children by the state, and that dates back to 1880 when compulsory schooling up to ten was first introduced.⁷³ While teachers were quick to outline parents’ duties in supporting their children’s advancements, however, they were less quick at Dovecot, it would seem, to identify their own role as teachers in creating, as Tisdall has stated, the ‘artificially limited working class students’ horizons’.⁷⁴ Nevertheless, the transition to universal and free state secondary education after 1944 was, in itself, an advance. Teachers also acknowledged the limitations that social structures imposed on them and parents, regardless of what they saw as their own expertise. Thus, in 1944 Headmaster Clark was just as vocal about the need for basic quality standards for children’s shoes as he would be a year later about his view of the failings of the working mother. In pursuit of protections around school uniforms, Clark offered ‘three samples of children’s shoes’ to the press which had ‘been worn through in fourteen days’, noting that ‘both school attendance and the children’s health suffered from poor footwear.’⁷⁵

Parents' support of their children's education is evident in the comments made by teachers regarding parental attendance at school events which was often registered as reasonable, even if the teachers' usual emphasis was on those parents who fell short of their expectations. Evidence of significant parental interest and concern with their children's education in Liverpool comes out strongly in the 1960s, as elsewhere across the country, when parents came out against secondary modern schools and restricted educational opportunities for the least affluent in society.⁷⁶ In 1967, parental complaints about the allocation system used for comprehensives in their first year in the city were reported by the Education Committee. The first process of comprehensive selection forced parents to choose selection *or* a comprehensive school. If parents chose the selection test and their child failed, they would have to send their child to the secondary modern and could not then send them to the comprehensive school unless there were still places available after allocating those who put it as their first choice. The Liverpool Education Committee reported that

it has been suggested that this was a form of blackmail in that some parents felt obliged to choose comprehensive schools for fear of their children failing the selective examination and being obliged to take a place in a secondary modern school.⁷⁷

While teachers at secondary moderns such as Dovecot were quick to blame parents for a lack of interest in their children's education, many parents were particularly sceptical about teachers' own offerings to their children in these schools.

Inequality, inclusion and state intervention in early years parenting in English education today

Today, the role of state educators in enhancing equality of opportunity, and thus democracy, has expanded. Attempts to influence parenting now extend back to pregnancy. As in the 1950s, limited education of parents prompts educators' action. For instance, the Family Nurse Partnership that was established with some success in 2007 offers parenting advice in the form of weekly nurse visits to first-time mums under the age of twenty-four, and with limited GCSE passes.⁷⁸ The Early Years Foundation Stage, launched in 2008, obliges early years practitioners to inform parents of strategies to support children's learning at home in a bid to close performance gaps.⁷⁹ However, the current success in achieving such equality of

opportunity continues to be constrained even with the bi-partite system dismantled and these early years interventions. One reason for this is because the best schools are often in the most affluent areas. Proximity-based school acceptance criteria mean that children in the nearby affluent homes have priority in attending these schools and poorer students are overlooked.⁸⁰ Children allocated to some of the alternative schools consider the possibility of knife crime and limited career opportunities and, at the ages of ten and eleven, express fear at this prospect.⁸¹ Finally, contrary to the almost total separation of students with SEN at Dovecot in the 1950s, since the 1994 Salamanca Statement mainstream schools in England have been committed to the principle of inclusion of students with SEN in mainstream classes. This notion of inclusion emphasises helping every child to feel ‘happy’, ‘calm’, and ‘able to build social relationships’. Teachers agree that this creation of belonging is a virtue. However, many question their ability to deliver this for all students amidst the countervailing pressure of limited teacher resources, school measurement and examination performance.⁸²

Since 1944, state secondary schools have been sites of democracy, and as such will always be imperfect in achieving this goal, which requires constant struggle to maintain and enhance it. Looking at the current profile of secondary education, with perspective from the 1950s, its democratic functioning can be strengthened by supporting feelings of belonging in schools, increasing equality of access to good schools, and educational organisations’ continued communication with parents about strategies to support children’s progress and development.

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